

Report to:



Kittitas County Child Care Needs Assessment

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INTRODUCTION

Kittitas County received a grant from the Washington Department of Commerce to conduct a child care needs assessment. This assessment is intended to compile quantitative and qualitative data to assess county strengths, child care gaps, and the root cause of these gaps. Researchers were asked to fill in data gaps and include a focus on outdoor child care options.

This assessment is being published while we are engaged in a national dialog about child care and its importance as vital infrastructure to support positive outcomes for children, families, businesses, and communities. We have a once in a generation opportunity to meaningfully invest in strengthening our child care systems. National funds from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA), and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) are providing significant child care funding for states. Washington's Fair Start for Kids Act will expand access to quality child care for Washington's children and families. Washington State Department of Commerce grants and Early Learning Facilities funds provide additional child care investment opportunities.

This assessment is written for the Kittitas County Health Network and child care stakeholders at the county level, understanding the county has a unique role in shaping the early learning and child care infrastructure. We focused our analysis and recommendations with this in mind, while being clear about the layered impact of federal and state code, regulations, policies, procedures.

This assessment uses the term early care and education (ECE) to refer to care for infants, toddlers, and preschool-age children. The term school-age care, afterschool care, or out-of-school time care is used to refer to care for children from kindergarten-age through age 12. The term child care is used to refer to care for all ages.

METHODOLOGY

Researchers employed a mixed methods approach, using administrative, secondary, and primary data to complete the early childhood needs assessment.

- Administrative data was utilized to depict the current capacity and utilization of services.
- Secondary data accessed through multiple sources was primarily used to provide detailed information about demographic characteristics of Kittitas County residents.
- Primary data collection was intended to provide unique insights into the Kittitas County child care system and to inform the specific research questions associated with this needs assessment. Primary data was collected in three different ways: parent, child care provider, and employer survey (397 responses), three virtual focus groups with families and providers, and individual interviews with providers, program administrators, and county leadership.
- Best practices research was used to understand emerging child care practices in Washington and nationally and analyze the gap between the current landscape in Kittitas County and what a potential future vision for the child care system could be.

Research questions defined the scope of the needs assessment, and included a focus on:

- Demographic, economic, social, and health characteristics of the community.

- Capacity or supply of Kittitas County early care and education (ECE) and out-of-school time providers (including outdoor child care options), demand for child care, the impact of the gap between supply and demand, whether the gap impacted certain populations' ability to access care more than others, and how COVID-19 impacted access to/capacity of child care.
- Cost of child care and status of financial supports for families and providers.
- Quality of care and the infrastructure supporting quality, including licensing, Early Achievers, and kindergarten readiness, and the impact of these quality initiatives on provider quality and participation in the licensing system.
- Impact of child care access on workforce attachment.

SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY ASSETS

Kittitas County has significant strengths and assets in its child care system, including:

- **High-quality, committed child care providers.** Parents engaged in this assessment consistently spoke about the high-quality early learning environments provided by the county's licensed family home and center-based care providers. Parents reflected on the engagement level of providers with children and caregivers, and the efforts providers consistently make to meet families' unique needs, whether it be finding ways to share slots among families, having Spanish-speaking employees, or openly communicating with parents.
- **Coordination.** Stakeholders discussed coordination that occurred formally through the Early Learning Coalition and informally across parents as important community assets. The Early Learning Coalition has led important work to coordinate professional development and quality improvement among child care providers and between early care and education (ECE) and school-age educators. Parent coordination helps families become informed about capacity challenges, navigating waiting lists, and finding quality alternatives to licensed care when needed.
- **Leadership through the Kittitas County Health Network.** The Kittitas County Health Network serves as a leader in the early childhood system by securing resources and convening cross-sector leadership to address the county's intersecting early learning and development, family support, and health sector challenges.
- **Workforce support through Central Washington University (CWU).** Many people cited the importance of CWU as an education and training resource for the early learning and child development field and discussed the opportunity to further engage with CWU to strengthen the system's capacity.
- **Growing employer engagement.** Parent assessment participants expressed that one of the silver linings of the COVID-19 pandemic has been growing employer awareness and engagement in the issue of high-quality child care as needed support for their employed parents. Employers have participated significantly throughout the assessment process and are demonstrating commitment to collectively addressing this issue.

HIGH-LEVEL FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Kittitas County's child care needs assessment analyzed child care strengths and gaps related to access, quality, and workforce attachment. Central themes emerged related to funding, the child care workforce, and commitment to supporting the healthy development of children.

Access. Kittitas County does not have sufficient child care capacity to serve its children and families. Licensed provider capacity is lacking across all ages, but is particularly severe for infants, toddlers, and school-age children. Additional underserved populations include families with children with special needs, families needing care in non-traditional work hours (weekends, evenings, overnight), and families who identify as Latino/a/x. Capacity limitations cause significant stress for families and employers.

Quality. Families with children in licensed care are happy with the quality of care. However, there are many children receiving care in unlicensed, unregulated settings. Providers commonly cited licensing culture and enforcement approach, local requirements including fire and zoning, and the linkage of child care subsidies to Early Achievers as challenges to being a part of the licensed child care system. These challenges impact family home child care providers more than centers, resulting in a reduction in the number of licensed family home providers over time.

Workforce Attachment. Lack of child care availability negatively impacts parents' ability to be in, or pursue advancement in, the workforce. Employers are also negatively impacted, struggling to recruit and retain workers. The pandemic exacerbated barriers to workforce attachment resulting from insufficient child care, which further increased employer awareness and motivation to address child care challenges.

Funding. Cost is a commonly cited barrier for parents and providers. Providers have costs associated with physical infrastructure, supplies, workforce training, and compensation. There are multiple programs in place to offset costs for families and financially incentivize providers to provide subsidized care, but they are often not enough.

Child care workforce. Having a qualified, engaged workforce is foundational to child care capacity and quality. Support for the early childhood workforce can be strengthened to increase the number of qualified professionals recruited and retained in the field.

Commitment. There is growing awareness of the importance of high-quality early learning and development opportunities for all children, and particularly for children who have additional risk factors such as poverty status or special needs. In Washington and nationally, this awareness is increasingly being translated into tangible expressions of commitment through policy and funding. That said, there is still work to be done to develop the field, ensuring sufficient, sustainable capacity to meet the need of families in Kittitas County. The systemic infrastructure that supports K-12 and higher education is not in place for our youngest learners and their families.

“For me it’s a paradigm shift. We have to reprioritize and think of child care as infrastructure and a part of the fabric of our community. It’s a litmus test of how our community thrives. We have to have a fundamental shift in our priorities to care for our families that make up our communities. If we can’t do that, then what are we doing?” – Parent

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Kittitas is a rural county in central Washington, with a small, but growing and diversifying population of children and youth. The rate of growth in the child population in Kittitas County far outpaces the statewide growth rate (23% and 8% respectively). When analyzing population growth rates by race and ethnicity, the growth rate is highest for children identified as Latino/a/x (50%) and lowest for children identified as White (16%).

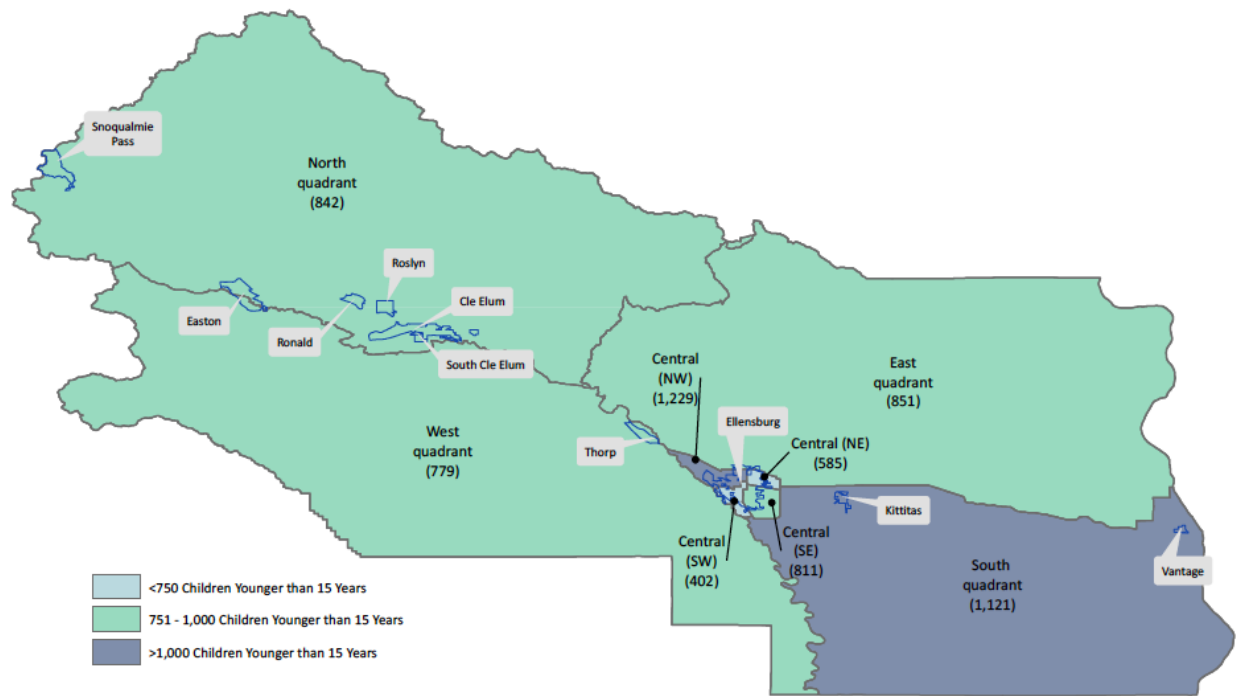
CHILD POPULATION BY AGE

According to the 2019 Census Bureau estimates, there are 6,620 children ages 0-14 years in Kittitas County. As shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2, the county is divided into eight census tracts. The highest percentages of young children (under age 5) relative to other age groups live in the northwest and southeast portions of Ellensburg, where 7.0 percent and 6.1 percent, respectively, of the population in these areas is comprised of young children. School-age children (ages 5-9 years) comprise 7.9 percent of the population in the south part of the county, which includes the communities of Kittitas and Vantage; this is the highest percentage of school-age children in the county. The south part of the county also has the highest proportion of children ages 10-14, at 8.2 percent of the population.

Overall, the south quadrant is the youngest part of the county, where 21.8 percent of the residents are children ages 0-14, compared to just 7.5 percent of the population comprised of children in the northeast portion of Ellensburg. In terms of the distribution of children countywide, 46 percent of Kittitas County children ages 0-14 reside in the four central census tracts, which includes the city of Ellensburg and immediately surrounding unincorporated areas. The highest concentration of children in the Ellensburg metro area is in the northwest corner of the area.

LARGEST NUMBER OF CHILDREN LIVE IN SOUTHERN REGION OF KITTITAS COUNTY

Figure 1. Number of Children is 0-14 Years of Age, Kittitas County and Sub-Areas, 2019



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2019

CHILDREN COMPRISE 6-19% OF SUB-AREA POPULATIONS

Figure 2. Count and Percent of Total Population that is Under 5 and 5 to 9 Years of Age, Kittitas County and Sub-Areas, 2019

Census Tract	Cities/ Communities	Children Under 5		Children 5-9		Children 10-14		TOTAL Ages 0-14		
		Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Countywide Distribution
Kittitas County Overall		2,139	4.7%	2,368	5.2%	2,113	4.6%	6,620	14.4%	100.0%
North quadrant	Cle Elum, Easton (part), Roslyn, Ronald, Snoqualmie Pass, South Cle Elum	240	3.6%	299	4.5%	303	4.5%	842	12.6%	12.7%
West quadrant	Thorp, Easton (part)	184	3.1%	322	5.4%	273	4.6%	779	13.1%	11.8%
East quadrant		282	5.2%	294	5.5%	275	5.1%	851	15.8%	12.9%
South quadrant	Kittitas, Vantage	295	5.7%	405	7.9%	421	8.2%	1,121	21.8%	16.9%
Central (NW)	Ellensburg	479	7.0%	441	6.5%	309	4.5%	1,229	18.1%	18.6%
Central (SW)	Ellensburg	136	4.9%	202	7.3%	64	2.3%	402	14.5%	6.1%
Central (NE)	Ellensburg	198	2.5%	171	2.2%	216	2.8%	585	7.5%	8.8%
Central (SE)	Ellensburg	325	6.1%	234	4.4%	252	4.7%	811	15.2%	12.3%

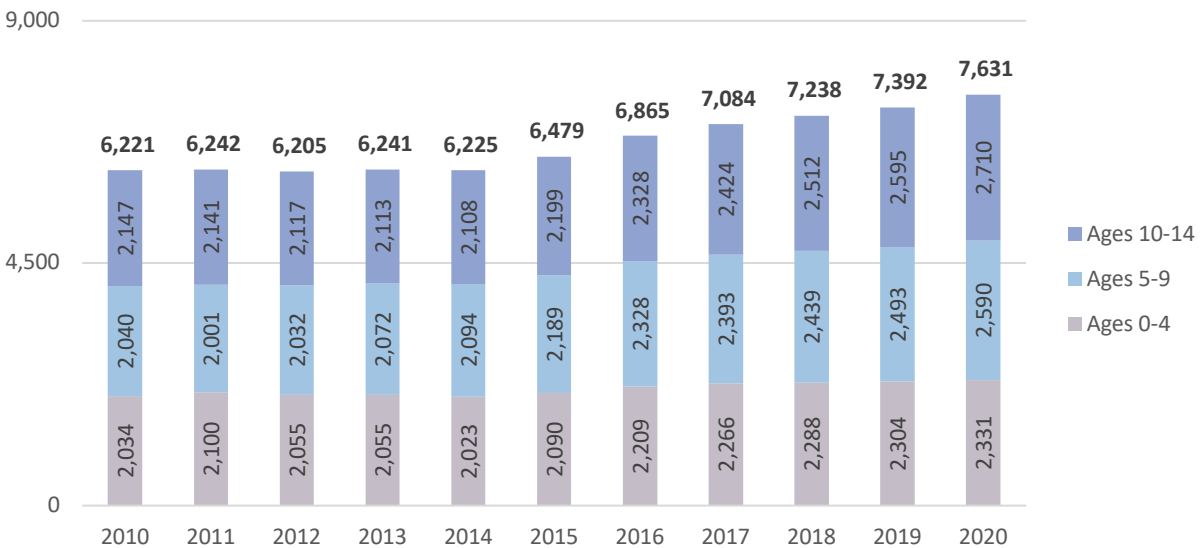
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2019, Table S0101

TREND OVER TIME

Between 2010 and 2020, the Kittitas County child population ages 0-14 was estimated to have grown 23 percent. The population ages 5-9 grew the fastest (+27%), followed by ages 10-14 (+26%), and trailed by comparatively slower growth among ages 0-4 (+15%). However, the Kittitas County child population growth rates are high compared to the state overall, which only saw an 8 percent increase in the child population over this period.

23% GROWTH IN KITTITAS COUNTY CHILD POPULATION BETWEEN 2010 AND 2020

Figure 3. Count of Children by Age Range, Kittitas County, 2010-2020



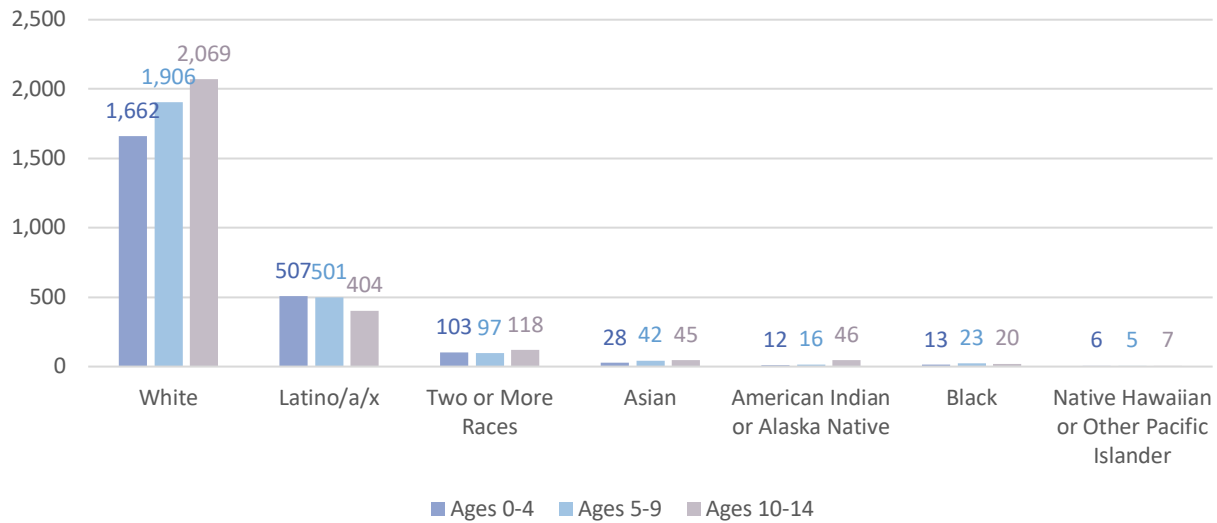
Source: Small Area Demographic Estimates by Age, Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin, Washington State Office of Financial Management, Forecasting and Research Division, 2010-2020

CHILDREN BY RACE/ETHNICITY

Most (74%) of children in Kittitas County are identified as White, not-Hispanic, followed by 18 percent identified as Latino/a/x of any race. Children who are identified as two or more races comprise 4 percent of the county population, while Asian children comprise 2 percent. American Indian or Alaska Native and Black children each comprise just 1 percent of the child population, while Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander children make up only 0.2 percent of the child population.

MOST KITTITAS COUNTY CHILDREN ARE WHITE, FOLLOWED BY LATINO/A/X

Figure 4. Count of Children by Age Group and Race/Ethnic Identification, Kittitas County, 2020



Note: The ethnicity “Latino/a/x” is of any race; the race categories are all non-Latino/a/x.

Source: *Small Area Demographic Estimates by Age, Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin, Washington State Office of Financial Management, Forecasting and Research Division, 2020*

In general, Kittitas County is becoming more diverse. Since 2010, children identified as Latino/a/x had the fastest rate of growth at +50 percent between 2010 and 2020. The slowest rate of growth was among White children at +16 percent over the same period.

COUNTY IS BECOMING MORE DIVERSE

Figure 5. 2010-2020 Change in Percent and Count of Children Ages 0-14 by Race/Ethnic Identification in Kittitas County

	White	Latino/a/x	Two +	Asian	American Indian	Black	Pacific Islander
Percent Growth	+16%	+50%	+42%	+40%	+27%	+28%	+44%
Absolute Growth	+780	+468	+95	+33	+16	+12	+6

Note: The ethnicity “Latino/a/x” is of any race; the race categories are all non-Latino/a/x.

Source: *Small Area Demographic Estimates by Age, Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin, Washington State Office of Financial Management, Forecasting and Research Division, 2020*

CHILDREN IN POVERTY

Countywide, according to U.S. Census Bureau figures from 2019, there are a total of 225 (8.9%) children under age 6 living in poverty and another 293 (10.7%) children ages 6-11 in poverty. See Figure 24 for more details on children in poverty.

Ages 6-11
in Poverty

293

Under Age
6 in
Poverty

225

ACCESS TO ECE AND SCHOOL-AGE CARE

Access¹ to early care and education (ECE) and out-of-school time care helps ensure strong foundations for Kittitas County's children. Families in Kittitas County struggle to access care in general. Families with infants, school-age children, children with special needs, with low- to-moderate incomes, and needing part-time or drop-in care face the greatest barriers to child care access.

CAPACITY

The child care landscape in Kittitas County is comprised of a mixed delivery system of public and private providers offering child care for all age groups, including infants, toddlers, preschool-age, and school-age care.² In this section we examine following:

- Child care **capacity**, including the intersection between **supply** (the number of child care slots) and **demand** (the number of children in need of care).
- The unique access challenges for **special populations** are also investigated, as well as impacts to capacity due to **COVID-19**.

CHILD CARE SUPPLY AND DEMAND

In this section we calculate the number of child care slots, the estimated demand for child care, and the resulting supply and demand calculus. We look at capacity for different age groups and by city, as well as different schedules (e.g., full-time, part-time, etc.).

CHILD CARE SUPPLY

KEY FINDING: The unduplicated capacity in Kittitas County across age ranges is 994, however the accepted capacity for all ages is lower: 732 slots. There are the fewest slots for infants.

Across all age ranges, as of early 2021, there was an unduplicated count of 994 licensed or state- or federal-program child care slots in Kittitas County. These estimates do not include unlicensed child care options, including unlicensed preschools, unlicensed family and informal providers, and unlicensed drop-in care providers, which supplement the licensed capacity and may increase access for some families.³

The figure of 994 represents the maximum capacity that a provider is authorized to have in care at any given time.⁴ However, providers may decide to accept fewer children than they are licensed

¹ In this assessment we are using the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families definition of access to ECE (or ECE availability) as described in *Defining and Measuring Access to High-quality Early Care and Education: A Guidebook for Policymakers and Researchers*: "Parents, with reasonable effort and affordability, can enroll their child in an arrangement that supports the child's development and meets the parents' needs." S. Friese, V. Lin, N. Forry and K. Tout, *Defining and Measuring Access to High-quality Early Care and Education: A Guidebook for Policymakers and Researchers* (Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017), OPRE Report #2017-08.

² According to the Washington Administrative Code, "Preschool-age children" means children thirty months through six years of age not attending kindergarten or elementary school. "School-age children" means a child not less than five years of age through twelve years of age who is attending kindergarten or elementary school.

³ There is no systematic count of unregistered, informal child care capacity in Kittitas County.

⁴ Capacity definition per WAC 110-300-0005 Definitions

to care for due to COVID or other reasons. Consequently, the accepted capacity is lower: 732 slots. Providers can offer their slots to a single age category, such as preschool age, or they can indicate their slot is open to children from more than one age category; therefore, the counts of slots by age category in Figure 6 below include duplication.

The age category with the fewest number of slots is 0-11 months (infants) – 87 slots – while the age category with the largest number of slots is 36 months to 5 years – 401.

LARGEST NUMBER OF SLOTS AVAILABLE IN PRESCHOOL AGE CARE

Figure 6. Count of Child Care Slots by Type of Care and Age of Child, Kittitas County, March 2021 (Licensed Capacity) or May 2021 (Head Start, Early Head Start and ECEAP)

	0-11 Months	12-23 Months	24-29 Months	30-35 Months	36 Months - 5 Years	School Age	Total Capacity	Total Accepted Capacity
Cle Elum	0	0	6	6	26	8	26	26
Licensed Family Child Care	0	0	6	6	8	8	8	8
ECEAP (part day)	--	--	--	--	18	--	18	18
Ellensburg	87	179	187	282	354	230	879	624
Early Head Start (Center Based)	16	16	16	16	--	--	16	16
Early Head Start (Home Based)	20	20	20	20	--	--	20	20
Head Start (full day)	--	--	--	--	72	--	72	72
Licensed Child Care Center	29	121	121	216	216	123	609	408
Licensed Family Child Care	22	22	30	30	66	62	72	63
Licensed School-Age Only	--	--	--	--	--	45	90	45
Roslyn	0	0	14	20	7	10	75	68
Licensed Child Care Center	0	0	14	20	7	10	75	68
Thorp					14		14	14
Developmental Preschool	--	--	--	--	14	--	14	14
Grand Total	87	179	207	308	401	248	994	732

Note: Head Start, Early Head Start, and ECEAP are for children from low-income households; not all families can qualify for these programs. The Thorp developmental preschool is for children with special needs.

Source: Licensed Capacity as of March 2021 provided by Catholic Charities of Central Washington based on data from Child Care Aware of Washington; Head Start/Early Head Start slots as of May 1, 2021 at [data.wa.gov](https://data.wa.gov/Education/Head-Start-Sites/q2jk-dthc) (<https://data.wa.gov/Education/Head-Start-Sites/q2jk-dthc>); ECEAP slots as of May 1, 2021 at [data.wa.gov](https://data.wa.gov/Education/DCYF-ECEAP-Sites/8ydb-ddzd) (<https://data.wa.gov/Education/DCYF-ECEAP-Sites/8ydb-ddzd>)

KEY FINDING: Fully 88 percent of child care capacity is located in Ellensburg, while the Ellensburg metro area is home to just 46 percent of children ages 0-14 in the county. While parents may prioritize care close to their place of work, and Ellensburg is an employment center for the region, some level of working from home is anticipated to remain after the end of the pandemic. This may increase demand for care close to home.

The Ellensburg metro area is home to 46 percent of children ages 0-14 in the county; most slots (88 percent of total capacity) are provided in Ellensburg. Ellensburg is an employment center for the region, and parents may prioritize having child care near their place of work rather than near their home. However, the location of child care is an issue for parents. As shown in Figure 22,

finding care that was close to home or work was a barrier for 21 percent of families looking for care and 8 percent of families with a child in care. The pandemic has led more businesses to permanently change to a hybrid model where employees work at home some days and come into the office other days. This trend may lead families to prioritize care close to home. Lack of care close to home, particularly for parents in more rural areas, may press families into poorer quality care:

“Upper County doesn’t have anything – maybe there’s one daycare in Roslyn. I spoke to a patient who said they hire their own nannies who aren’t working for whatever reason. When they come home, the children haven’t been changed and have diaper rashes.” – Health Provider

Apart from the developmental preschool, the Thorp area does not have child care options:

“There is nothing out here. There’s no child care, no out-of-school care. There was one mom who was watching a teacher’s kids, but we have neither licensed nor unlicensed child care.” – Educator

RECOMMENDATION: Pursue options to expand care in rural areas of the county. Consider using ARPA dollars as seed funding.

KEY FINDING: Stakeholders report a decline in family home child care, mirroring national trends.

While licensed capacity trend data were not available in time for publication in this needs assessment, stakeholders report that the region has followed the national trend in a decline in the number of licensed family home child care providers.⁵ Some of the decline may be at least partially attributable to state-level code changes. In addition, the pandemic has hit family home child care hard, only exacerbating existing negative pressures on family home child care providers.

“We lose home daycares every year and I almost feel they want to shut us down.” – ECE Provider

“There’s been a decline in home based care because of changes in the state.” – ECE Provider

As discussed in more detail below, low provider wages do not serve to attract or retain providers of any type of care, but particularly family home child care. Codes and red tape may also be a barrier for many would-be licensed family home child care providers.

“We need to put more of an emphasis on in-home care; make it a living wage. It needs to be more accessible and less intimidating.” – Community Stakeholder

Family home child care was also cited by stakeholders as promising solution to the lack of care for infants in particular, since family home child cares are more likely to accept infants than center-

⁵ National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance, “Addressing the Decreasing Number of Family Child Care Providers in the United States” (https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/addressing_decreasing_fcc_providers_revised_march2020_final.pdf)

based care and, on average, family home child care infant care costs less than center-based (see Figure 17).

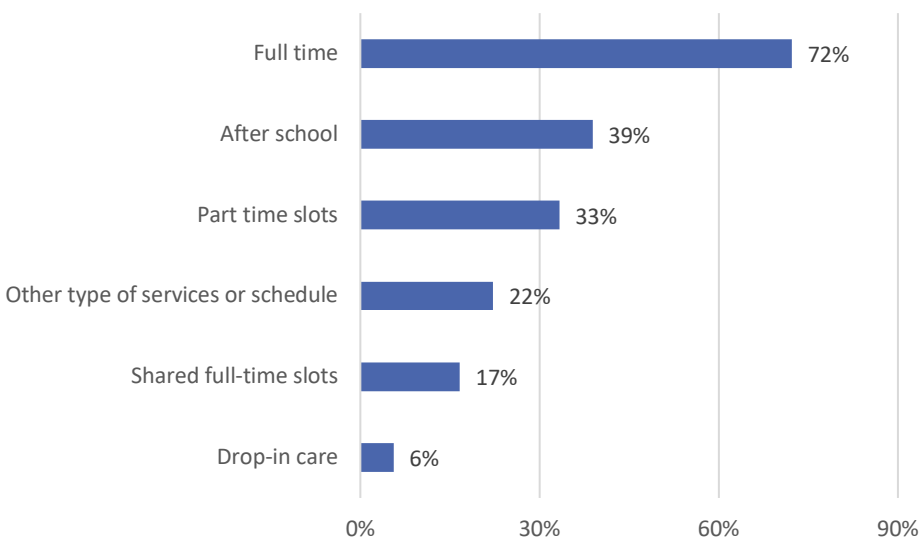
RECOMMENDATION: Work to increase the number of family home child care providers in Kittitas County through recruitment and enhanced, targeted support. The county could recruit individuals considering opening a child care business and/or help existing caregivers to become licensed. The quality section below includes recommendations related to providing pre-licensing support and developing or implementing staffed family child care networks, which may include shared services models focused on the family home child care provider needs. The quality section also discusses advocating to include family home child care providers in licensing and Early Achievers discussions in the state to make the systems work better for them.

KEY FINDING: Most providers offer full-time care, while afterschool and part-time options are limited.

Survey data reveal that families seeking care are largely looking for part-time care. Most provider survey respondents offered full-time care. One-third said they offered part-time options, which may include shared full-time slots. Just over one-third offered afterschool care, also supporting stakeholder feedback on limited afterschool care options. Comparing the responses from families seeking care and the type of care providers offer suggests that supply for part-time care and after-school care may not meet demand. Additionally, families seeking care were more likely than families with care to cite availability of part-time care options as a challenge in finding child care.

MOST PROVIDERS OFFER FULL-TIME CARE; AFTERSCHOOL AND PART-TIME OPTIONS ARE LIMITED

Figure 7. Percent of provider by type of care offered (N=18)



Source: Kittitas Child Care Needs Assessment Survey

ESTIMATED DEMAND

KEY FINDING: There are an estimated 6,547 children ages 0-12 in Kittitas County potentially in need of care. Given the high labor force participation rates for parents nationwide (71.2 percent for mothers and 92.3 percent for fathers), a conservative estimate is that at least half of these children (3,273) have all parents in the labor force and need some type of care.

Not all families need or seek child care. Demand for child care is driven in large part by parental employment ambitions; parents who want or need to work will need care. Estimates of the number of children with all parents in the workforce can help stakeholders understand potential demand for child care. Two estimates for this figure are provided in this section, each with limitations:

- According to the 2019 American Community Survey (ACS), there were 1,460 children under age 6 with all available parents in the labor force. There are another 3,542 children ages 6-17 with all available parents in the labor force. Since 2010, the region has seen 36 percent growth in the number of children under age 6 with all available parents in the labor force.
- As shown in Figure 12, the Washington Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) estimated that as of March 2021, there were 1,437 children under school-age with all available parents in the labor force.⁶ Most (849) of these children were infants or toddlers, and 588 were preschool age.

Both estimates are limited in that they only include infant, toddlers, and preschool-age children (or in the case of the ACS, the older age range includes children age 13-17 who typically do not need care). Further, estimating demand based on parents in the labor force is limited because it does not capture parents sitting out of the labor force – potentially due, in part, to barriers to finding child care – and therefore does not capture full demand. For this reason, and due to data availability, in the next section that analyzes the supply and demand gap, an estimate of the total child population is used as a comparison to the number of slots at different age ranges:

- As shown in Figure 11, based on modified Washington State Office of Financial Management figures, there are an estimated 6,547 children ages 0-12 in Kittitas County: 451 infants, 677 toddlers, 1,722 preschoolers, and 3,698 school-age children.⁷

Nationwide, the labor force participation rate – the percent of the population working or looking for work – for all women with children under 18 was 71.1 percent and 65.8 percent for women with children under age 6. For all men with children under age 18, the labor force participation rate was 92.3 percent and 93.4 percent for men with children under 6. Married mothers with children under 18 had a labor force participation rate of 69.2 percent.⁸ Overall, parental labor force participation rates are well over half of all parents. Using 50 percent labor force participation as a conservative benchmark, a rough estimate of demand is 3,273 Kittitas County children ages 0-12 in need of some type of care while their parent(s) work.

⁶ Includes counts of children in two-parent families in which both parents are in the labor force and include counts of children in single-parent families in which the parent is in the labor force.

⁷ Population figures are modified for the purpose of estimating demand based on the demographic estimates by the Washington State Office of Financial Management; the population estimates in this display are not official figures.

⁸ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Characteristics of Families – 2020 (<https://www.bls.gov/news.release/famee.nr0.htm>)

KEY FINDING: Part-time, afterschool, and full-time care are most in demand, yet part-time and afterschool care are less commonly offered compared to full-time care.

Kittitas County parents seeking care report that they are mostly in need of part-time care, followed by afterschool care (including summertime care/camps), while providers indicate that they mostly get calls for full-time care, followed closely by part-time care. Survey input from providers indicates that they are most likely to offer full-time care.

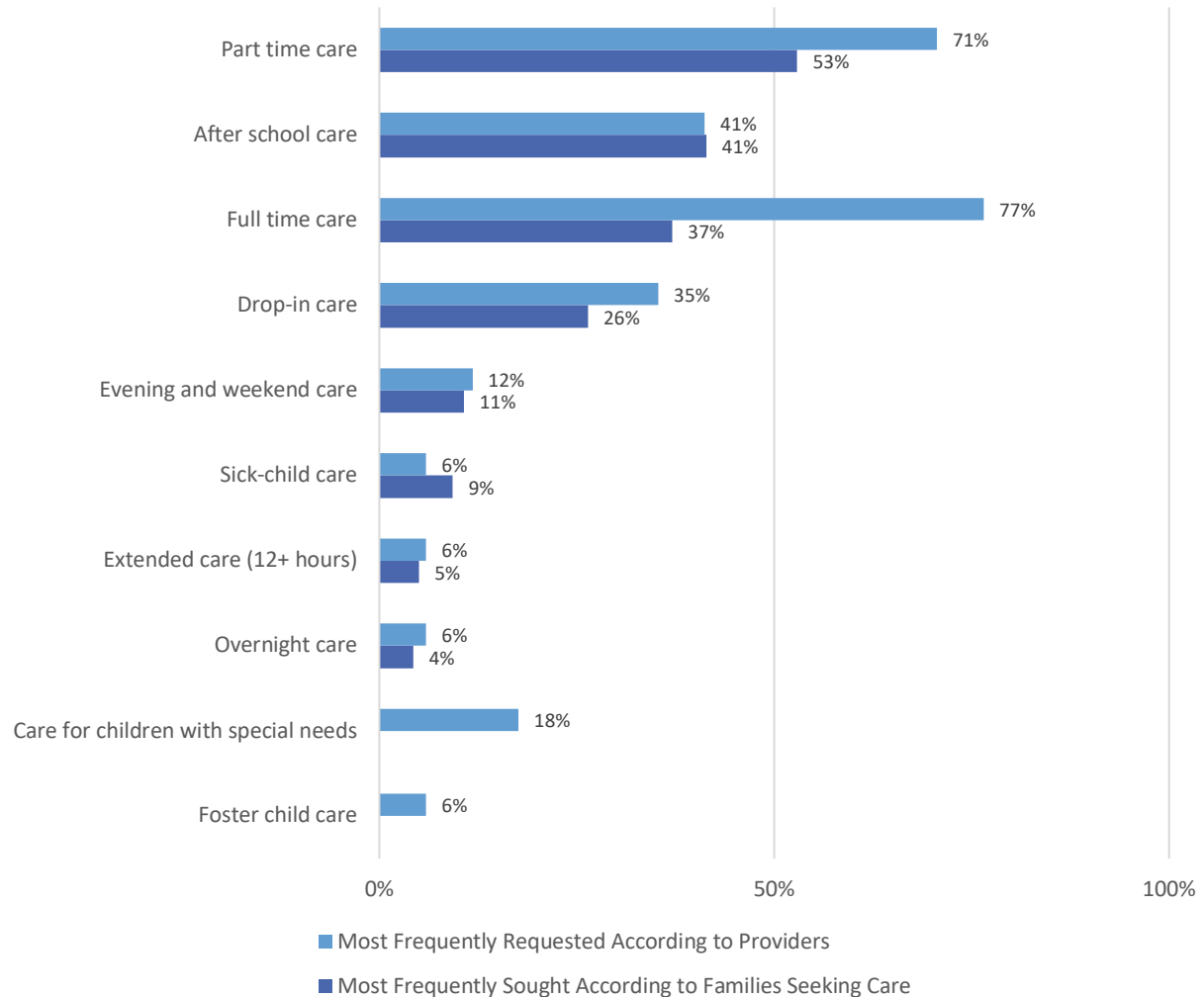
As shown in Figure 8, input from providers and families seeking care suggest strong demand for full-time, part-time, and afterschool care, yet limited supply of part-time and out-of-school time care options. Among families seeking care, more than half (53%) were looking for part-time care, and 41 percent were seeking afterschool care. Full-time care, drop-in care, and evening and weekend care were also in demand. Provider respondents to the child care survey were asked to indicate which child care services were most commonly requested. More than three quarters of them (76%) cited full-time care, and 71 percent identified part-time care as commonly requested. Afterschool and drop-in care were each identified as common requested by more than one-third of provider respondents.

While off-hours care was less frequently cited, stakeholders report that the lack of licensed off-hours care negatively impacts the parents that need it.

“Single parents sometimes have to hire a babysitter to do pick up because we're only open from 7:30a - 5:30p.” – ECE Provider

MOST FAMILIES SEEKING CARE WERE LOOKING FOR PART-TIME AND AFTERSCHOOL CARE; PROVIDERS GET REQUESTS PREDOMINATELY FOR FULL- AND PART-TIME CARE

Figure 8. Type of Care Sought by Families Seeking Care (N=140) and Percent of Child Care Provider Survey Respondents Identifying Type of Child Care Services Most Commonly Requested (N=17)



Source: Kittitas Child Care Needs Assessment Survey

KEY FINDING: Families need more part-time and drop-in options, particularly for those seeking behavioral health or substance use disorder treatment.

Stakeholders report that the region needs part-time or drop-in care options for parents, particularly for those needing or participating in mental health or substance use disorder treatment. Stakeholders report several barriers or challenges for parents in this situation:

- Limited care options mean some parents don't get the therapy they need, or they leave their children with unlicensed individuals who may not be providing adequate, quality care during therapy.

- Family is not eligible for child care subsidies to support their care needs (because they are not working or a student) or their challenges are sufficiently severe that applying for a subsidy is not possible.
- The Employment First model for treatment and recovery is negatively impacted by the lack of child care access, particularly in off-hour care.

“I have clients who are not eligible for TANF or who can’t complete tasks, so are not able to access child care subsidies. So, they leave their children with unlicensed people who may not be providing adequate, quality care during therapy.” – Health Provider

RECOMMENDATION: Expand high-quality child care capacity available during non-traditional work hours. Stakeholders recognize that offering part-time or drop-in care is difficult for providers, who need to make ends meet by filling full-time, year-round slots. However, stakeholders cite promising strategies in other regions in the state, such as partnerships between school districts and YMCAs to offer afterschool drop-in care options for school-age children at all school sites. Stakeholders also cited a gap in care during school vacations and the summer break that could be filled by these school district/provider partnerships. As with other capacity recommendations, there is an opportunity for employers to invest further in developing solutions.

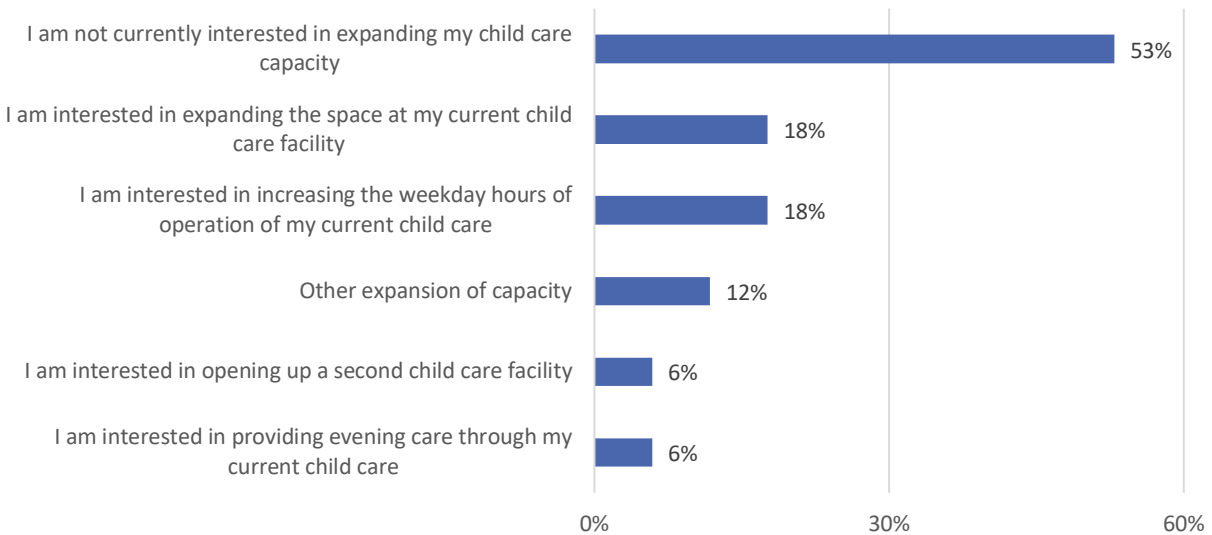
KEY FINDING: Most current providers are not interested in expanding capacity.

Despite stakeholder feedback on opportunities for increased care capacity, most providers are not interested in expanding capacity. For some respondents, they are federally funded and do not have the ability to increase capacity themselves. For others, they cite facility costs and difficulty finding employees as key barriers to expansion. Complying with state regulations and employee turnover also limit provider interest in expansion. The difficulty of finding employees intersects with the barrier of state regulations for one survey respondent, citing the barrier of “finding qualified employees that meet state WAC requirements.” However, some providers were interested in expansion.

“Depending on the community needs, I’d consider evening care or every other weekend.” – ECE Provider

MOST PROVIDERS ARE NOT INTERESTED IN EXPANDING CAPACITY

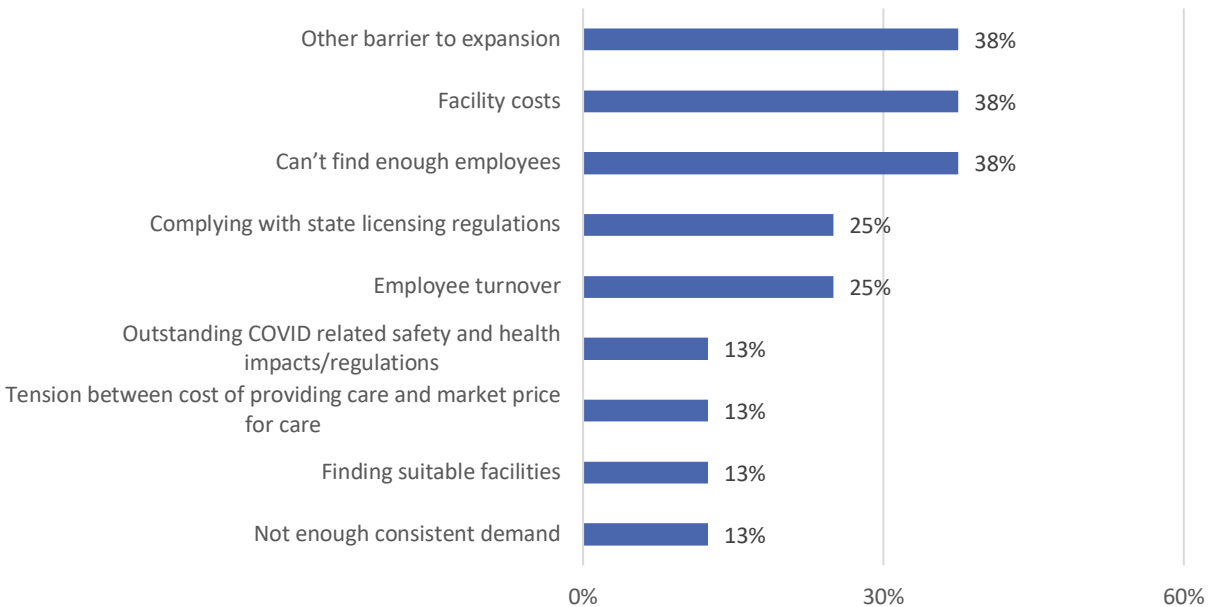
Figure 9. Percent of provider survey respondents by interest in expanding capacity (N=17)



Source: Kittitas Child Care Needs Assessment Survey

FACILITY COSTS AND LACK OF WORKFORCE LIMIT INTEREST IN EXPANSION

Figure 10. Percent of provider survey respondents by barriers to care expansion (N=8)



Source: Kittitas Child Care Needs Assessment Survey

RECOMMENDATION: Analyze opportunities for increased financial support of child care programs, including:⁹

- **Startup funding/grants** to support new ECE providers, potentially with a focus on family home, infant-toddler, special needs, and rural capacity.
- **Expansion funding/grants** to allow child care providers to invest in expanding capacity and addressing facility needs, including modifications to support children with special needs.
- **Emergency grants/funding** to address damage or other infrastructure needs to ensure licensing and local regulation compliance.
- **Non-traditional hour care increased reimbursement** to provide additional incentive for providers to provide care outside of traditional business hours.
- **Part C collaboration or special need care stipend** as potential mechanisms to provide further financial and technical support to ECE providers working with children with special needs.
- **Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership stipend** to support licensed ECE providers to adopt the Early Head Start model and to Early Head Start providers to mentor and support ECE providers as they move toward the Early Head Start model of high-quality infant/toddler care.

American Rescue Plan Act and Washington Fair Start for Kids Act could be funding sources. Funding could also come through local or regional sources, including business investment, levies, and other dedicated tax dollars.

KEY FINDING: Providers and Spanish-speaking parents expressed doubts about the feasibility or desirability of full-time outdoor school, while English-speaking parents were interested in full-time outdoor school, finding that the part-time options currently available do not accommodate working parents.

Provider survey respondents were asked whether they would be interested in building capacity to become a licensed outdoor child care program. Roughly two-thirds (65%) of provider survey respondents were not at all or not very interested in building this capacity, while 18 percent each might be interested or were definitely interested. The hesitancy was captured in interviews and focus groups, as well. Most providers in interviews and focus groups indicated they already do quite a bit outside – and even more lately due to COVID – or they supported providing more care outdoors, but not all the time, particularly for full-time child care:

“When I had my program, I was outside a lot, but making an actual outdoor program wouldn't be a realistic option because of the cold winters and hot summers. We have outdoor programs in town, but between smoke, freezing, and heat, there'd be a dozen times a year you'd have to shut down.” – ECE Provider

⁹ Additional funding ideas can be found in the ECE Business Collaboratory State Child Care Business Ecosystem Strategy Guide, May 2021 (https://mcusercontent.com/1c73875f5972490c527db8b8c/files/415b53c0-be81-46e5-6af8-a7998e9251fc/2021_5_FCF_State_ECE_Business_Ecosystem_Strategy_Guide_6_.pdf)

Providers said they would appreciate having funds to expand and improve their outdoor spaces, which might facilitate more time outside. While full-time outdoor school appeared to be a barrier for providers, several were interested in learning more about it.

English-speaking parents indicated interest in outdoor school but stated that the current options have limited hours that are not helpful for working parents. For those who looked into it, they stated cost was a barrier as well. Spanish-speaking families who participated in the assessment were more circumspect, indicating they were not sure they would want their child outside all day.

RECOMMENDATION: Increase parent and provider awareness and understanding of outdoor education opportunities so community stakeholders have a better understanding of the model and its benefits on children’s development.

RECOMMENDATION: Pursue outdoor education primarily as a strategy to meet demand for part-time, drop-in, and afterschool care.

RECOMMENDATION: Work with selected interested providers and parents to investigate full-time options.

CAPACITY ASSESSMENT

KEY FINDING: Child care capacity does not meet demand.

DCYF estimates that only 19 percent of demand for care for children under age 6 is met in Kittitas County; this research estimates that there is a child care slot for only 15 percent of children ages 0-12 in the region. Waiting lists of more than a year, multiple deposits required to be put on waiting lists, and never getting calls back are common experiences for Kittitas County families.

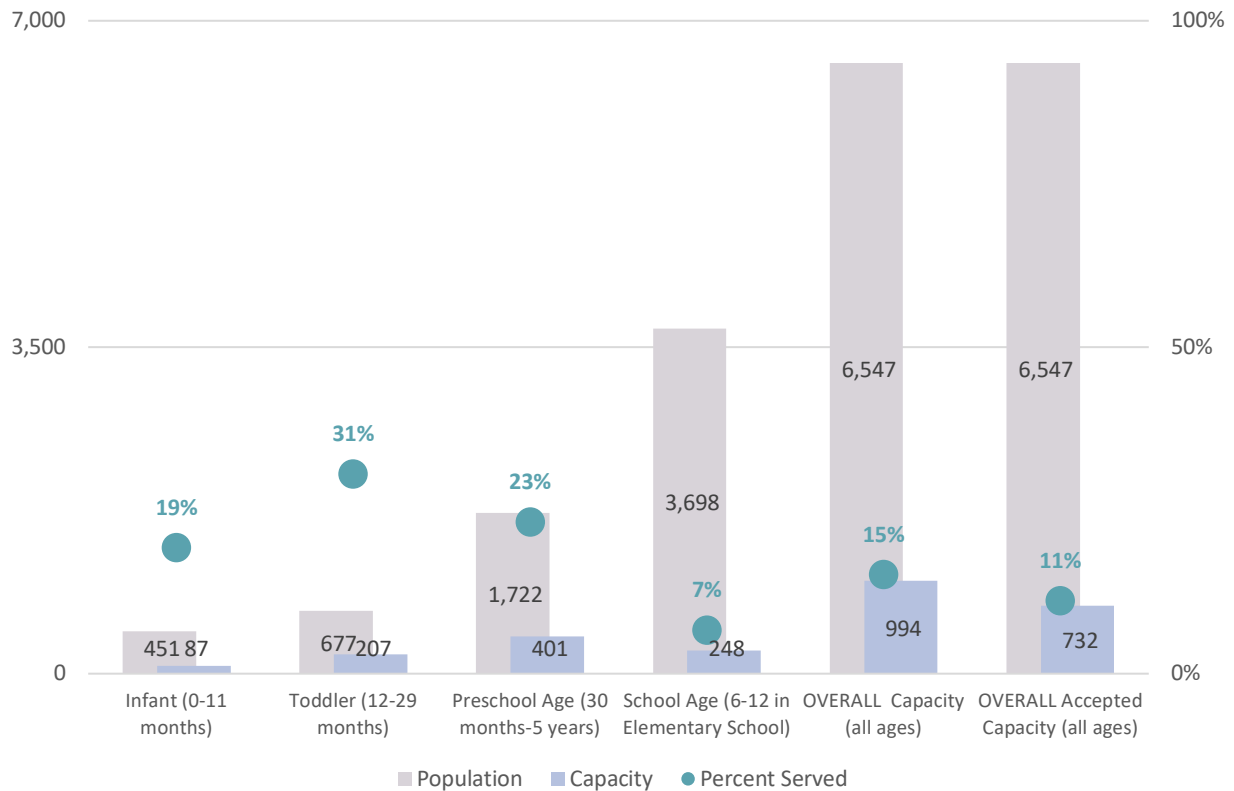
OVERALL CHILD CARE SUPPLY AND DEMAND

Figure 11 shows child population estimates to approximate the ability of the region to meet the demand for child care through licensed or state/federal programs. It does not consider whether the child is in a family where the parent or parents are working, nor does it capture unlicensed or informal care. However, it does capture all ages (birth through age 12); DCYF estimates of supply and demand for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers (not school-age) is presented in the following subsection.

Based on this analysis, there is a licensed or state/federal child care slot for only 15 percent of children ages 0-12 in Kittitas County. This figure drops to just 11 percent when only the accepted capacity is used. Among the different age groups, the gap is largest for school-age care, where there is a child care slot for only 7 percent of school-age children in the county.

CAPACITY TO SERVE SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN IS MOST CONSTRAINED

Figure 11. Combined Licensed, Head Start, Early Head Start, and State-funded (ECEAP) Child Care Capacity by Age Compared to Population by Age, Kittitas County, 2020 (population) or 2021 (capacity)



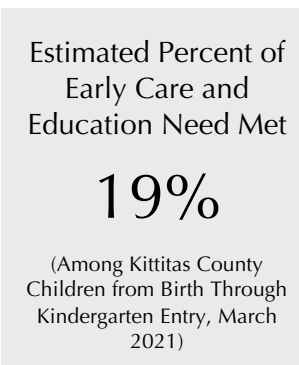
Note: The age ranges presented are informed by the definitions in the Washington Administrative Code for licensing, the age categories in the licensed capacity dataset, and the age eligibility for Early Head Start, Head Start, and ECEAP. There is overlap or duplication in the slots by age range since a single slot could be filled by a child in two or three different age ranges (e.g., the slot may be open to an infant, toddler, or preschooler). Therefore, the percentage served by age is an estimate, since a slot in a particular age category may be filled by a child in a different age category. Further, the licensed capacity dataset included six age categories which were collapsed into four categories. Toddlers include the counts for children ages 12-23 months and 24-29 months. There are more slots serving 24-29 months than 12-23 months; to provide the most generous assessment of capacity, the larger of the slot counts was used in this display even though not all children in this age range are eligible for the slot. Preschool-age includes the counts for children 30-35 months and 36 months-5 years (not attending Kindergarten). There are more slots serving 36 months-5 years than 30-35 months; similar to the toddler display, the larger of the slot counts was used in this display. The overall assessment of capacity, regardless of age, is based on an unduplicated count of slots. Population figures are modified for the purpose of estimating demand based on the demographic estimates by the Washington State Office of Financial Management; the population estimates in this display are not official figures. School-age population figures include children ages 6-12, whereas capacity data may include children who are age 5 and in kindergarten.

Source: Licensed Capacity as of March 2021 provided by Catholic Charities of Central Washington based on data from Child Care Aware of Washington; Head Start/Early Head Start slots as of May 1, 2021 at data.wa.gov (<https://data.wa.gov/Education/Head-Start-Sites/q2jk-dthc>); ECEAP slots as of May 1, 2021 at data.wa.gov

(<https://data.wa.gov/Education/DCYF-ECEAP-Sites/8ydb-ddzd>); *Small Area Demographic Estimates by Age, Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin, Washington State Office of Financial Management, Forecasting and Research Division, 2020*

EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION SUPPLY AND DEMAND

According to an analysis by DCYF, only 10 percent of eligible infants and toddlers (0-35 months) are served by current licensed or state/federal child care programs and only 31 percent of eligible preschool age children are served. Overall, it is estimated that only 19 percent of the need for early care and education among children from birth through kindergarten entry is met countywide. As the maps indicate (Figure 13), capacity is more constrained in Kittitas County than many other counties in the state.



BETWEEN 10% AND 31% OF LOCAL EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION NEED IS MET

Figure 12. Estimated Percent of Child Care Need Met, Kittitas County, March 2021

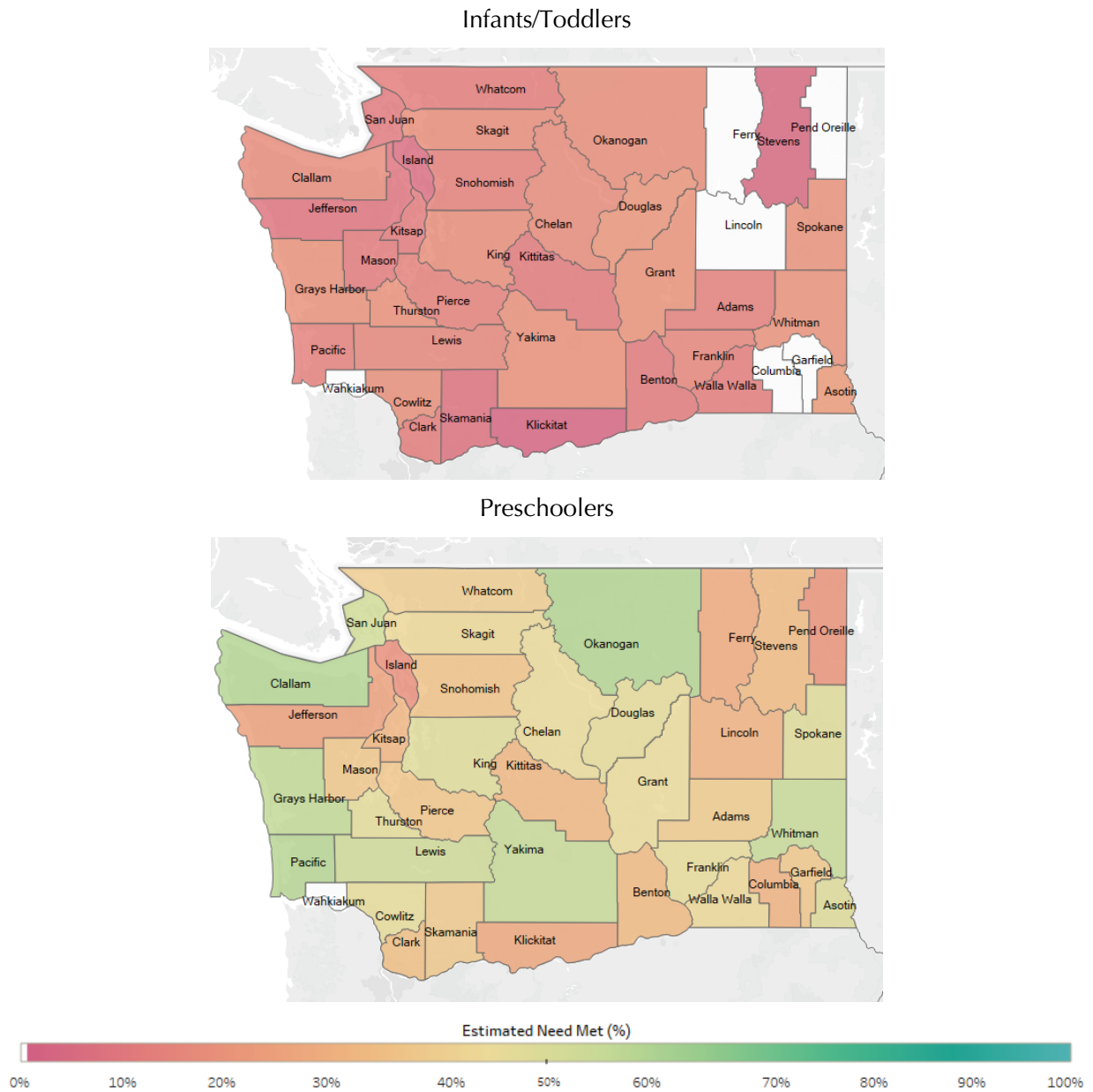
	Infant/Toddler (0-35 months)			Preschool (36 months – school-age)		
	Eligible Children	Children Served	Estimated Need Met	Eligible Children	Children Served	Estimated Need Met
Kittitas County	849	87	10%	588	185	31%

Note: Estimates include ECEAP, Head Start, Early Head Start, Child Care Centers and Family Homes. The “need” estimate is from the American Community Survey and is defined as all available parents in the labor force. The “supply” estimate is from March 2021 DCYF facilities licensing, subsidized child care, and ECEAP/Head Start counts.

Source: DCYF Early Learning Data Store, Eligibility Table (ELDS); March 2021 release (<https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/practice/oiaa/reports/early-learning-dashboards>)

ONLY 10% OF ESTIMATED NEED FOR INFANT/TODDLER CARE IS MET, WHILE ONLY 31% OF ESTIMATED NEED FOR PRESCHOOL IS MET

Figure 13. Maps of Estimated Percent of Child Care Need Met for Infants/Toddlers and Preschoolers, Washington State Counties, March 2021



Note: Estimates include ECEAP, Head Start, Early Head Start, Child Care Centers and Family Homes. The “need” estimate is from the American Community Survey and is defined as all available parents in the labor force. The “supply” estimate is from March 2021 DCYF facilities licensing, subsidized child care, and ECEAP/Head Start counts.

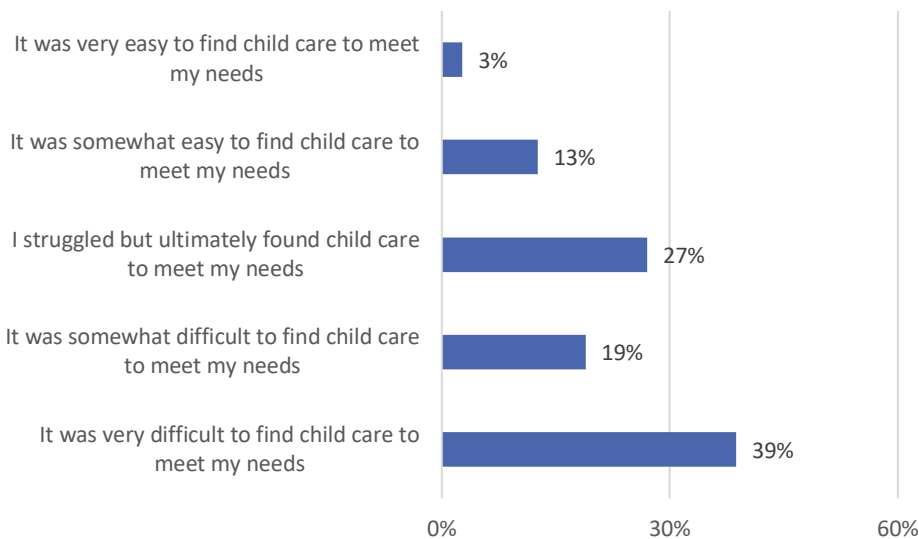
Source: DCYF Early Learning Data Store, Eligibility Table (ELDS); March 2021 release (<https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/practice/oiaa/reports/early-learning-dashboards>)

KEY FINDING: Approximately 8-in-10 parents with children in care reported difficulties accessing care.

Families and providers validated the data showing gaps in child care supply. As shown in Figure 14, family survey respondents currently using child care indicated challenges in finding child care to meet their needs. Nearly 40 percent (39%) indicated that it was very difficult to find child care that met their needs, and nearly 20 percent (19%) indicated it was somewhat difficult. Just 16 percent of family survey respondents indicated that it was very or somewhat easy to find child care to meet their needs. Among provider survey respondents, 59 percent indicated that they usually or always have to turn families away or put them on a waiting list, compared to 35 percent that sometimes have to put families on a waiting list or 6 percent that never have to turn families away or use a waiting list.

MOST RESPONDENTS REPORTED DIFFICULTIES IN FINDING CHILD CARE

Figure 14. Percent of Families Using Care Reporting Difficulty in Finding Care (N=111)



Source: Kittitas Child Care Needs Assessment Survey

Difficulty in finding care that met their needs varied somewhat by family characteristics:

- Families with lower incomes (less than \$50,000) who were using care were more likely to identify cost as a challenge and were also more likely to identify challenges in finding care that aligned with their work schedules.
- For families seeking care, families with lower income were more likely to cite location of child care and that child care options were full as a barrier to finding care.
- Single parents survey respondents were more likely to cite affordability and hours that aligned with their schedules as barriers to finding child care.

The limited availability of all care types – especially full, part, and afterschool time care – and care for different age ranges – particularly infants and school-age – were widely corroborated by interviewees. Waiting lists of more than a year, multiple deposits required to be put on waiting lists, and never getting calls back from providers were all commonly reported challenges among parents.

“I get calls everyday and I have nowhere to send them. I give them the phone number to Child Care Aware, but from what I hear, there's no place to send people. It's been that way for over the past 2 years.” – ECE Provider

KEY FINDING: Infant care is among the least available types of care and the low availability of infant care places stress on young families and presses them into informal care arrangements they may not choose otherwise.

Many stakeholders reported on the dearth of infant and toddler care and the stress this places on young families.

“To not know if you have child care [for your infant] is terribly stressful. Added stressors is the last thing a parent of an infant needs.” – Community Stakeholder

Further, lack of infant care capacity presses many families to juggle care by family members or to seek informal care through posting on social media or hiring a nanny, which may or may not have child development experience or knowledge.

“I don't know if there is anywhere in Cle Elum that provides infant care. I just see people putting things on FaceBook. I don't know what people do with infants.” – Educator

Contributing to poor infant care capacity is the need for low child to provider ratios (4-to-1). Consequently, some providers offer limited slots. With only 10 percent of estimated need for infant and toddler care met, parents are forced to game the system. Given multi-year-long waiting lists, providers report counseling families to get on waiting lists well before their child is born, or if they plan to have a second or third child, to plan ahead and get those yet-to-be-conceived children on a list. But this advice is word of mouth and not widely known by all families, leaving some families at a loss when they start to look for care after their child is born.

“I'm expecting a baby and due in October. I would need child care in January or March next year, with family medical leave and parental juggling. I'm terrified – I'm on a bunch of lists.” – Parent

Families that are lucky enough to get an infant slot may have to decide whether to pay for care they are not using either because they are not back at work yet or they don't need full-time care, or pass on the slot and hope it will remain open down the line.

For one interviewee with an 18-month-old, the pandemic actually gave them an opportunity to get care:

“We had been on waiting list for some time. Finally, we got in because of COVID. It worked to our advantage. We had been on list for 2 years. Previously we had a nanny.” – Parent

Stakeholders noted the importance of continuity of care for children at the younger ages, where a child can begin care in infancy and continue through to school-age or beyond. But to have this continuity, there need to be more options for the youngest children.

RECOMMENDATION: Support efforts to increase licensed infant/toddler care options, as well as advocate to increase Working Connections reimbursement rates to incentivize more providers to accept subsidies for infant/toddlers.

KEY FINDING: School-age children are underserved, with a child care slot for only 7 percent of children in this age group, but Ellensburg School District will be offering before and after school care programs at its elementary schools during the 2021/22 school year.

“My children have to be alone afterschool unsupervised.” – Parent

With a child care slot for only 6 percent of children ages 6-12, several stakeholders expressed a desire for an option like a Boys & Girls Club that students can access after school. They noted that one option fulfilling this need (Afterschool Safe Place) closed and will not be back in operation this fall. According to the interviewee, a big part of this closure was due to COVID and the combined challenge of not knowing what public schools will look like in the fall and the difficulty of finding staff.

As districts make plans for the fall, the picture is becoming clearer. Stakeholders were pleased to learn that Ellensburg School District will be offering onsite before and afterschool programs at Valley View and Mt. Stuart elementary schools, with a program at Ida Nason Aronica Elementary starting in January 2022 once construction of this new school is complete.¹⁰ District representatives report that there will be no maximum number of slots, saying they will hire the amount of staff needed to meet demand. The program accepts subsidies for eligible families.

Assessment stakeholders discussed how they hope this action by Ellensburg School District will inspire other districts to offer similar school-age programs. They also cite this model as an opportunity to increase the availability of drop-in care and potentially a pathway to serving the gap in care during school vacations and the summer break. Outdoor school could be a type of care ripe for expansion to meet the needs of school-age part-time or drop-in care seekers.

RECOMMENDATION: Support efforts to increase out-of-school time care, including outdoor school options, which would serve the school-age population particularly well. High school or college-age students could provide staffing resource, including summertime care.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF SPECIAL POPULATIONS

KEY FINDING: The county does not have sufficient early intervention or school-age child care for children with special needs.

Different families faced different barriers to child care access based on their unique needs. Stakeholders report that families in the region with children with special needs have no full-time child care options and limited part-time availability. Thorp Developmental Preschool is well regarded, but stakeholders remarked that it cannot meet the demand for services or the schedule needs of working families. It also has a waiting list. Children from outside the Thorp School District may attend the developmental preschool if it has met the demand within district. Interview feedback notes that the program has recently extended the half day program by an hour to include lunch, but it is still not sufficient to meet the true demand for care for children with special needs. Multiple stakeholders suggested the need for a regional full-time developmental learning center for children with special needs.

“Our county needs a full-time developmental learning center for kids with special needs. We have a two hour per day center with the school district. For

¹⁰ Right at School (<https://www.rightatschool.com/districts/ellensburg-wa/>)

middle class parents, who don't have the subsidy that the state would pay for one-on-one teacher, they need access to a full-time developmental child care center.” – Community Stakeholder

“The developmental preschool in Thorp has been received really well! There’s a waiting list. There is nothing out here. There’s no child care, and no out-of-school care.” – Community Stakeholder

RECOMMENDATION: Continue to assess options to support access to high quality early intervention and child care for children with special needs, including:

- Offering supports and training to providers to better equip them to serve children with special needs including mental health consultation.
- Increasing incentives to care for children with special needs in integrated settings.
- Investigating the feasibility of a full-time developmental learning center for children with special needs, perhaps modeled on the Valley Intervention Program in Yakima, which accepts children up to 8 years old.
- Increasing outreach and awareness of Child Find to identify children with special needs.

KEY FINDING: Latino/a/x families would benefit from more culturally and linguistically responsive outreach and programming.

Community stakeholders indicated that Latinx families face unique barriers to child care access and participation. Latino/a/x families may not speak English and may rely on older children for communication. This limits family access to outreach material that is presented in English and hinders critical communication with children’s child care providers who may only speak English on student progress and center updates. Additionally, stakeholders remarked that child care providers who only speak Spanish may be overwhelmed by licensing requirements and requests for information and may not feel a sense of mutual respect between Spanish speaking providers and licensing staff. This limits the potential to increase licensing participation by Latino/a/x providers. Lack of affordable, accessible, and culturally appropriate care can lead to potentially dangerous scenarios:

“Families came to do seasonal work and would be put on night shift. They would put kids to bed and go to work – even young kids.” – Educator

Latino/a/x families also worry about lack of culturally and linguistically responsive programming in terms of supporting their culture outside of the home. Several family focus group respondents wished for more Spanish speaking child care providers to help maintain the language outside of the home. Providers report that hiring interpreters can improve access for limited English proficient families, including hiring high school or university students to provide a link for these families. Providers also cite the benefit of bilingual education for both the English language learners and the English-only students.

“Providers not speaking Spanish is an issue because it’s hard to know if a child’s needs are being met. When I worked with migrant families, they were hesitant to seek out child care because of the language barrier. They tended to use

*friend and family network care, which can be great, but not always.” –
Community Stakeholder*

Beyond the language, families also wished for more diverse food and activity options to expose their children, as well as children who do not identify as Latino/a/x, more consistently to cultural norms and experiences.

*“Sometimes [the children] don’t like the food and they won’t eat all day.” –
Parent*

RECOMMENDATION: Investigate creative options for bilingual child care outreach and increase cultural diversity training. Stakeholders suggested developing relationships with high school students to serve as liaisons for Spanish speaking child care providers and families seeking care. They also recommend increasing cultural diversity training to expand the cultural food, books, and activities provided through child care programs.

KEY FINDING: Demand for child care for children in foster families varies, but stakeholders note the need for more child care options for children in foster care.

Children in foster care may need inconsistent or emergency child care options that are hard to access. Moreover, Native American children in foster care may be limited to more specific foster care settings that meet cultural needs. Stakeholder described the benefits of the Skookum House for emergency foster care needs.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON CAPACITY

Most parent survey respondents (60%) indicated that their child care arrangements were disrupted due to the pandemic, and nearly half (48%) had fully resumed at the time of the survey. Eighty-eight percent of provider survey respondents indicated that the child care services they provide had been disrupted by the pandemic, and 54 percent noted that services had mostly or fully resumed pre-COVID access and operations.

MOST CHILD CARE HAS MOSTLY OR FULLY RESUMED PRE-COVID ACCESS

Figure 16. Percentage of provider respondents by child care access and operation status (N=15)

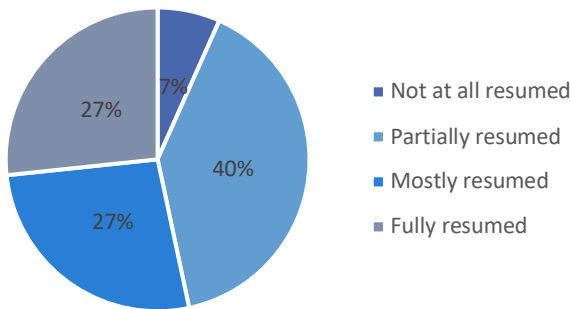
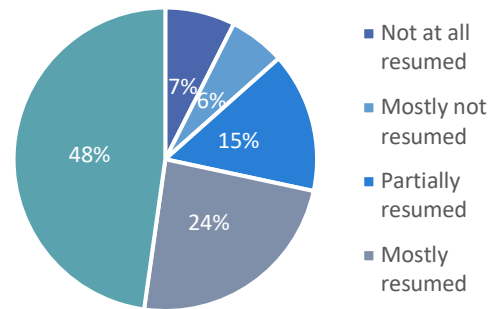


Figure 15. Percentage of parent respondents by child care access and operation status (N=67)



Source: Kittitas Child Care Needs Assessment Survey

In interviews and focus groups providers reported a wide variety of effects from COVID:

- Some indicated that, as of spring 2021, they are still not at capacity. Some anticipate that demand will return in the fall, and they will be allowed to serve more students for longer hours, but others are waiting to see what happens.
- With private pay families leaving and providers taking more students with subsidies, the bottom line was affected for many providers. Providers that are currently taking more subsidy students indicate they will have to go back down to usual levels after the pandemic ends.
- Federal stimulus kept many afloat during these times.

“Child care is a need in our county, however, in 2020 we saw a major drop in demand. I'd always filled all my spots and be full 4 months ahead. I'm curious to see what will happen this year.” – ECE Provider

“There were barriers before COVID and think there will be barriers after.” – ECE Provider

The impact on families was severe as well, with families sharing stories of juggling care among family members when their provider shut down or reduced capacity:

“I struggled when my son’s school was shut down. I became aware of a youth center in town and have been on the waitlist since it started. When school first shut down, I had no options, and my son needed to do online work on his IEP. He had to go on a semi with my dad and be gone all week since I’m a single mom. It has been very challenging. And he hates it. Now he is back 4 days a week. I finally got into the youth center, but there’s no bus service to the youth center.” – Parent

On occasion, families reported that the pandemic gave them an opportunity to get into care when others were pulling their kids out.

“We got into daycare because of COVID. I think a lot of other people pulled their kids out. We were both working from home, so it worked out for us. Once COVID is gone and he is back in care full-time it may get harder. Kindergarten is not back at 5 days a week yet. I’m not sure what people are going to do.” – Parent

COST AND AFFORDABILITY

Child care costs have increased over the past decade, in many cases faster than inflation, and many parents report that child care costs are a significant burden, particularly those who are lower income but not eligible for subsidy.

This section provides findings related to the following:

- The trend in the **average cost** for different types of care and for different age groups and trend in **median family income**.

- **Parent reports** that paying for care is their greatest child care challenge.
- **Subsidized child care capacity**, including subsidized care slots (i.e., ECEAP or Head Start) and trends in the number of providers accepting Working Connections subsidies.

COST OF CHILD CARE

KEY FINDING: Care costs have increased faster than inflation for most types of care and age ranges. Costs are highest for center-based infant and toddler care.

Typically, center-based care is more costly than family child care home settings and this bears out for Washington State as a whole, but not necessarily in Kittitas County. While center-based settings are slightly more costly than family home care for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, they are less for school-age children, on average. The rates are also closer than the statewide average rates. In general, costs for child care decrease as a child grows, however, stakeholders report that the overall increase in the cost of care over time makes that less of a savings that one would assume.

“There have been cost increases over the years. Generally, it gets cheaper as kids get older, but we are paying more for 3-5-year-old care than we paid for his infant care. The increase is a lot, and it is outpacing the increase in our income.” – Parent

Stakeholders report that costs are largely a function of what they have to pay in wages for staff. Providers have been required to pay more as minimum wage has gone up:

“We thought we were paying a decent wage and now we are struggling to increase salaries, plus increases for tenure, performance, etc.” – ECE Provider

COSTS IN KITTITAS COUNTY ARE SIMILAR FOR FAMILY HOME AND CENTER-BASED CARE

Figure 17. Average Monthly Cost for Child Care by Age of Child and Setting, Kittitas County and Washington State, 2019

		Infant	Toddler	Preschool	School-age
Kittitas County	Family Home	\$803	\$758	\$650	\$488
	Center	\$878	\$850	\$767	\$314
Washington State	Family Home	\$950	\$840	\$758	\$433
	Center	\$1,211	\$1,040	\$923	\$550

Source: Kidscount.org

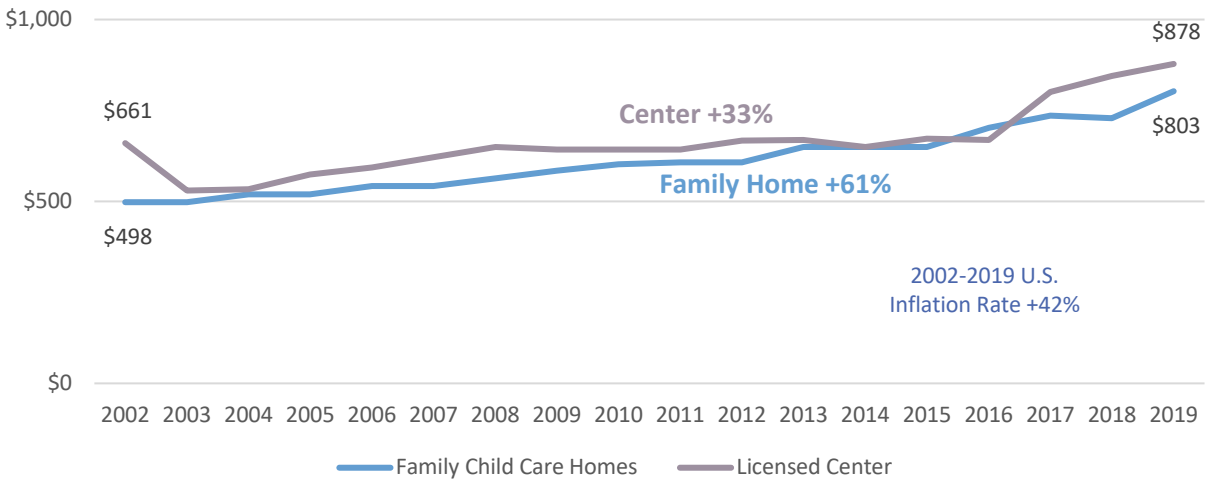
INFANT CARE

Between 2002 and 2019, family home care costs for an infant in Kittitas County increased faster than inflation (61 percent vs. 42 percent), while center-based infant care grew slower than inflation (33 percent vs. 42 percent). Infant child care costs for both settings increased faster

statewide than in Kittitas County and inflation: +70 percent for family home and +74 percent for center-based care in Washington state on average.

FAMILY HOME COSTS FOR INFANTS OUTPACED INFLATION, WHILE CENTER-BASED DID NOT

Figure 18. Average Monthly Cost and 2002-2019 Change for Child Care for an **Infant** in Kittitas County Compared to the National Inflation Rate between 2002-2019



Source: Kidscount.org; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Inflation Calculator

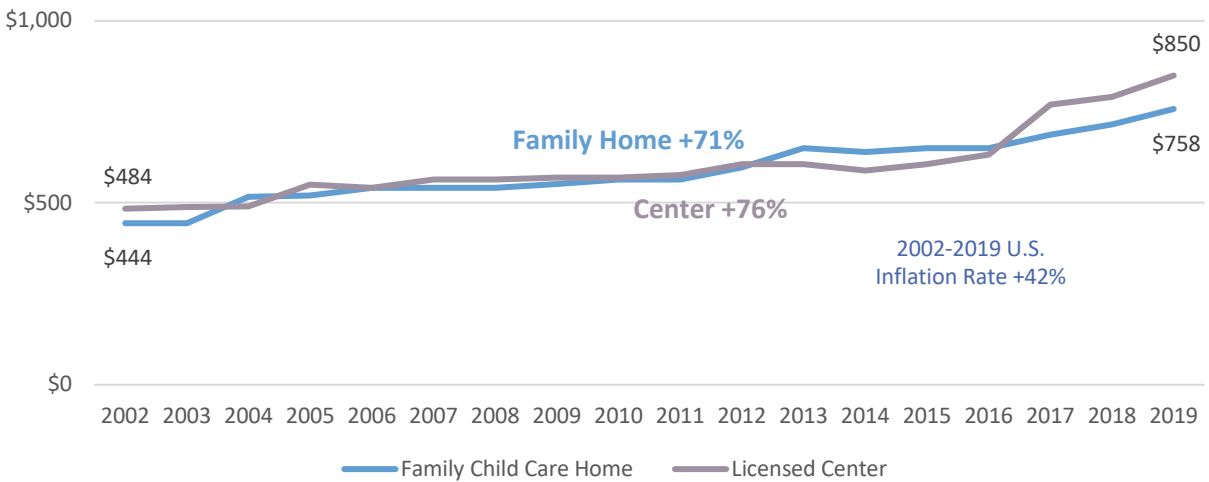
TODDLER CARE

Between 2002 and 2019, child care costs for toddlers in Kittitas County increased faster than inflation. The national inflation rate was 42 percent in this period, while family home toddler care costs increased 71 percent and center-based costs increased 76 percent. These growth rates were

mirrored statewide, where family home toddler care costs grew an average 72 percent statewide and center-based toddler care costs grew 78 percent.

INCREASE IN COSTS FOR TODDLER CARE SUBSTANTIALLY OUTPACED INFLATION

Figure 19. Average Monthly Cost and 2002-2019 Change for Child Care for a **Toddler** in Kittitas County Compared to the National Inflation Rate between 2002-2019



Source: Kidscount.org; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Inflation Calculator

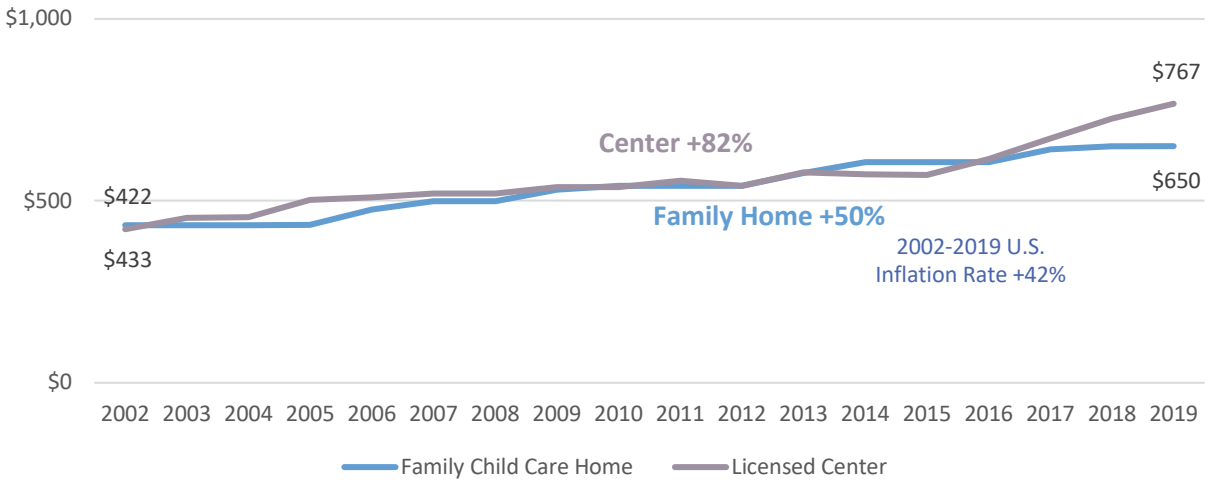
PRESCHOOL CARE

Between 2002 and 2019, family home costs for a preschool age child grew 50 percent in Kittitas County, which is just slightly faster than the national inflation rate of 42 percent over this period. Whereas child care costs for preschoolers in center-based programs grew 82 percent, which is

nearly twice the rate of inflation over this period. Preschool costs statewide grew 75 percent for children in family home settings and 78 percent for children in center-based settings.

CENTER-BASED PRESCHOOL CARE COSTS GREW NEARLY TWICE AS FAST AS INFLATION

Figure 20. Average Monthly Cost and 2002-2019 Change for Child Care for a **Preschool** in Kittitas County Compared to the National Inflation Rate between 2002-2019



Source: Kidscount.org; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Inflation Calculator

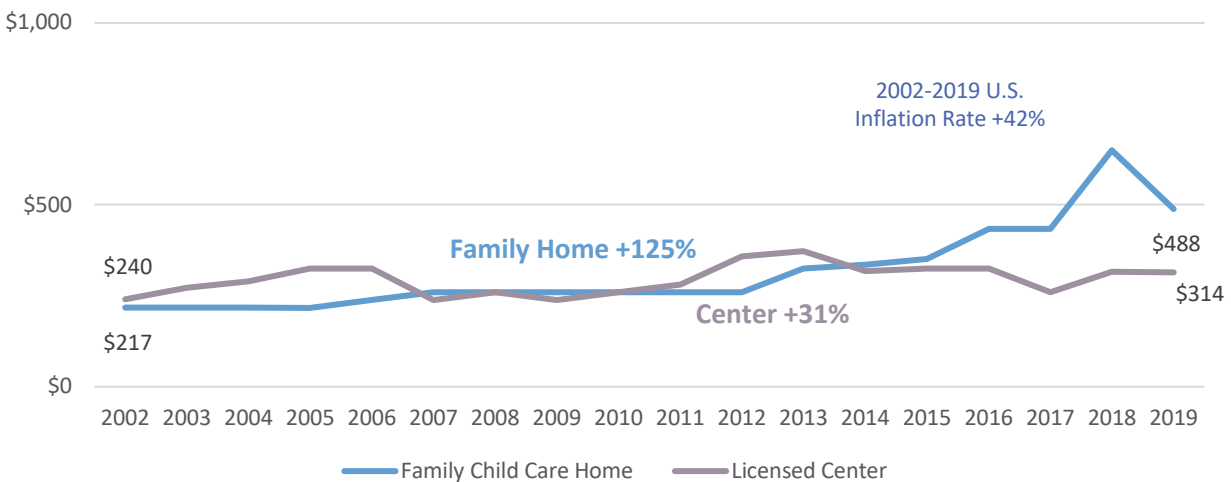
SCHOOL-AGE CARE

Between 2002 and 2019, family home costs for a school-age child grew 125 percent in Kittitas County, which is three times faster than the national inflation rate of 42 percent over this period. Whereas child care costs for preschoolers in center-based programs grew 32 percent, which is slower than the rate of inflation over this period. Statewide, school-age care costs in family home

care also grew rapidly, up 100 percent over this period, while school-age care costs in center-based settings grew 83 percent statewide.

FAMILY HOME SCHOOL-AGE CARE COSTS GREW THREE TIMES AS FAST AS INFLATION

Figure 21. Average Monthly Cost and 2002-2019 Change for Child Care for a **School-age** in Kittitas County Compared to the National Inflation Rate between 2002-2019



Source: Kidscount.org; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Inflation Calculator

KEY FINDING: Median income for families grew slower than average child care costs.

Among the 3,828 families with children under 18 in Kittitas County, the median income was \$78,026 in 2019. Married couples with children (2,956) have a higher median income (\$88,838) while families with children led by a single mother (585) have a much lower median income (\$34,720). Families with children led by a single father (287) have a median income of \$50,987.¹¹

Between 2010 and 2019, increase in the cost of care in Kittitas County ranged from +20 percent (family home preschool age) to +88 percent (family home school-age), with an average increase of about 40 percent across all types of care. Over the same period, median income for families with children grew 28 percent – somewhat slower than the rate of growth in cost for most types of child care.

KEY FINDING: Parents report that “cost/affordability” is the primary challenge they experience with child care.

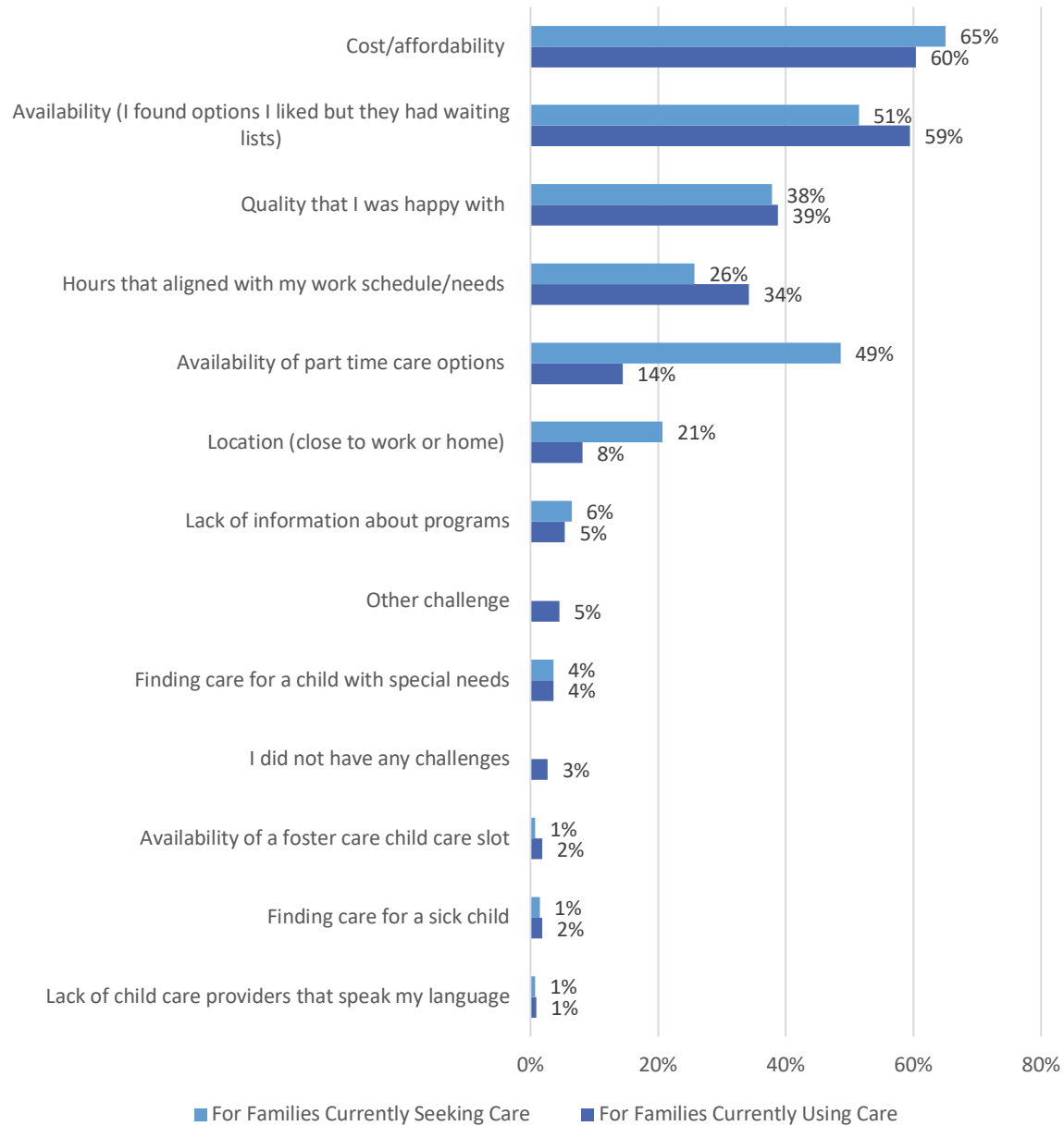
Child care cost and affordability was the primary challenge among family survey respondents. Sixty percent of families with children currently in care cited affordability as a challenge when they were looking for care, and 65 percent of families currently seeking care cited cost and affordability as a challenge.

“I’m spending more than my mortgage to send both of my girls to daycare so I can work.” – Parent

¹¹ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2019, Table S1903

AFFORDABILITY AND AVAILABILITY ARE KEY CHALLENGES FOR FAMILIES CURRENTLY USING AND SEEKING CARE

Figure 22. Top Three Challenges When Looking for Child Care, Among Families with Children Currently in Care (N=111) and Families Currently Seeking Care (N=140)



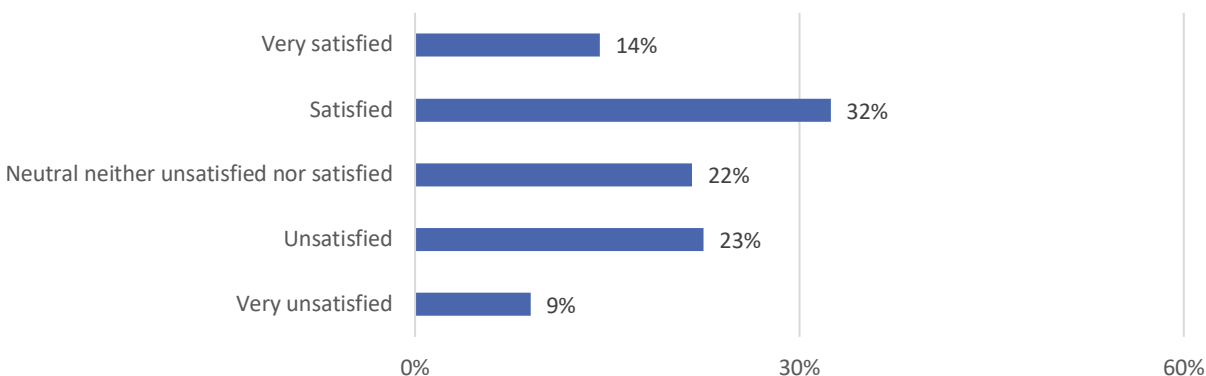
Source: Kittitas Child Care Needs Assessment Survey

Respondents were mixed on their satisfaction with the cost of care. Despite citing cost and affordability as a key barrier to finding child care, nearly half (46%) of family survey respondents

with children currently in care were satisfied or very satisfied with the cost of their child care. Thirty-two percent were unsatisfied or very unsatisfied.

SATISFACTION WITH THE COST OF CHILD CARE WAS MIXED

Figure 23. Percent of Family Survey Respondents Currently Using Child Care by Satisfaction with Cost of Care (N=111)



Source: Kittitas Child Care Needs Assessment Survey

Among family survey respondents with children currently in care, half of respondents paid between \$500 and \$999 per month for child care for their youngest child in care. Most survey respondents (87%) were paying fully out of pocket for their child care expenses. Nearly half (49%) of family survey respondents with children in care considered child care expenses to be somewhat of a financial burden, 37 percent considered them to be a large burden, and nearly 14 percent considered them no burden at all.

RECOMMENDATION: Analyze opportunities for increased financial support of families including:

- **Additional co-pay assistance for families with low and middle incomes.** The county or state could pay a higher percentage of families’ copays to increase access licensed child care.
- **Essential worker funding/grants through the American Rescue Plan Act.** States have the flexibility to fund child care for essential workers through the ARPA, increasing the pool of families eligible for this support.

SUBSIDY USE AND ACCEPTANCE

KEY FINDING: Overall, there is insufficient access to all types of subsidized care, with families in the middle-income ranges – who are not eligible for subsidies but still in need of support – struggling to afford care.

Working Connections is Washington State’s child care subsidy program for lower income families. Currently, as of May 2021 there is no waiting list for eligible families and a waiting list has not been in effect since 2011. However, the availability of subsidies and the availability of subsidy-accepting slots are entirely separate. A family may receive a subsidy, but then find that they cannot find a center that will accept their subsidy. Further, families report experiencing the

“middle class squeeze”, where those in the middle-income ranges are not eligible for subsidized care, but the wages of local jobs are not high enough to make paying for child care worth it:

“My wage is paying for child care.” - Parent

“It's financially crippling, especially for those who make too much to be eligible for the subsidy.” – ECE Provider

For Early Head Start and Head Start slots in Kittitas County, there is currently no waiting list for eligible families; however, ESD 105, which operates the programs, indicates that they do have families inquiring who are not income-eligible for a slot.

“We're seeing a lot of families are over-income, so they're stuck – whether it's worth working or just staying at home.” – Head Start Provider

POPULATION ELIGIBLE FOR SUBSIDIZED CARE

KEY FINDING: There are approximately 400 Kittitas County children under age 6 who may be eligible for one of the 108 Early Head Start or Head Start slots, and approximately 104 children ages 3 and 4 who may be eligible for one of 18 ECEAP slots.

EARLY HEAD START AND HEAD START

At the base level of eligibility, children from families with income below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) are eligible for Early Head Start (EHS) or Head Start (HS). In Kittitas County, there are an estimated 225 children under age 6 – the target age range for Early Head Start and Head Start – with most (76) residing in Ellensburg, where the EHS/HS programs are based. The Head Start full day preschool program can serve 72 children and Early Head Start can serve 16 in the center-based program and 20 in the home-based program. These data suggest that at total of 108 slots, EHS/HS can more than meet the need for children from families experiencing poverty in Ellensburg, but there are an estimated remaining 117 young children countywide who are eligible.

Under certain circumstances, Head Start can offer slots to family earning up to 135 percent of the poverty level and, for children with an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individualized Education Plan (IEP), they can increase the eligibility by another 10 percent.¹² In Kittitas County, as of 2019, there were an estimated 217 children under age 6 living in families with incomes between 100-124 percent of poverty level, and another 196 living in families with incomes between 125-149 percent.¹³ Therefore, roughly speaking, another 400 young children may be eligible for EHS/HS countywide.

ESD 105, which is the local contractor for EHS and HS, reports challenges filling slots, even with reduced class sizes due to COVID and offering transportation for families that need it. For example, there are currently no children participating in the home-based program. This is after ESD 105 reduced the number of home-based slots and increased the number of full-day slots to try to meet more of the community's needs. While ESD 105 is the new contractor and does not have historic data on capacity and availability, long-term EHS/HS employees report that challenges filling slots predated the pandemic. Consequently, in the past and currently, families that seek an

¹² Children with special needs may qualify for an IFSP (Individualized Family Service Plan) and IEP (Individualized Education Program).

¹³ The data source does not provide the count of children living under 135% of poverty.

EHS or HS slot and that are income-eligible can get a slot. However, EDS 105 reports that they often must turn away families that earn too much to be eligible. Some focus group participants reported that COVID gave them an opportunity to access a Head Start slot.

RECOMMENDATION: Work with ESD 105 to develop strategies to maximize the use of EHS/HS slots. This could potentially include increased outreach, offering sites in other cities than Ellensburg, transitioning home-based slots to center-based, adding hours of care or modifying hours to be more flexible, and/or filling open slots with higher income (but still low income) families.

ECEAP

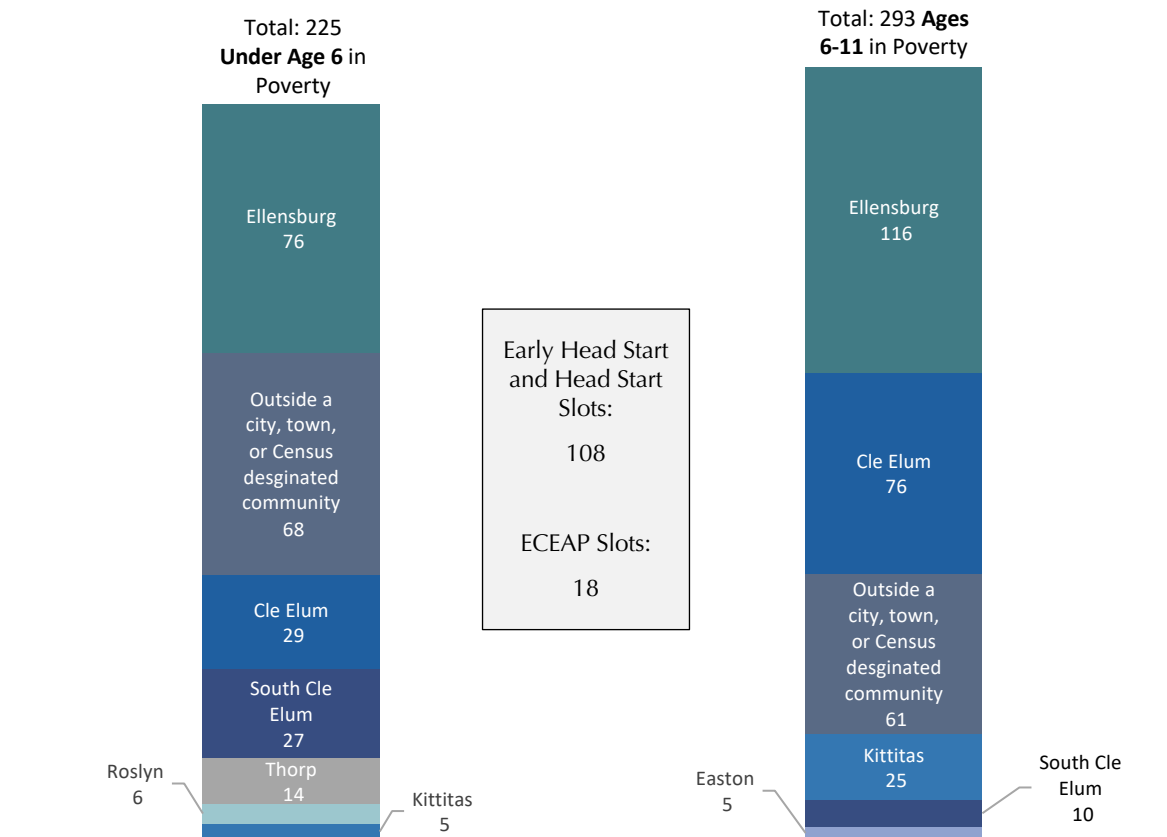
The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) is a comprehensive preschool program that provides free services and support to eligible children and their families.¹⁴ ESD 105 is the local contractor for ECEAP, which offers 18 part-day slots for preschool age children in the Cle Elum-Roslyn School District. The 2020 income eligibility limit for children was 110 percent of the FPL, which is equivalent to an annual income of \$28,820 for a family of four. The program is open to income eligible 3- and 4-year-old children. Census counts of children in poverty are not provided for 110 percent of poverty or just for the 3- and 4-year-old age groups; however, a rough estimate is that there are approximately 104 children in Kittitas County who are eligible for ECEAP.¹⁵

¹⁴ WAC 110-300-0005 Definitions

¹⁵ This estimate was calculated as follows: total count of children under age 6 in poverty (225) divided by 6 to arrive at a single year age count estimate (37.5) and multiplied by 2 to arrive at 75 children ages 3 and 4 in poverty. The count of 217 children under age 6 between 100% and 124% of poverty was divided by 25 for a single percent child count (8.68), which was further divided by 6 to calculate a per year child count (1.45). This figure was multiplied by 10 and doubled to arrive at 29 children ages 3 and 4 between 100% and 110% of poverty. These two figures were summed to arrive at an estimate of 104 children.

225 YOUNG CHILDREN COUNTYWIDE LIVE IN FAMILIES WITH LOW ENOUGH INCOME TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR HEAD START; ANOTHER 293 CHILDREN AGES 6-11 IN POVERTY

Figure 24. Count of Children Under Age 6 and Ages 6-11 Living Below the Poverty Threshold by City and Kittitas County Overall, 2019



Note: The data source reported no children under age 6 living in poverty in the communities of Easton, Ronald, Snoqualmie Pass, and Vantage, and no children ages 6-11 living in poverty in the communities of Ronald, Snoqualmie Pass, Vantage, Roslyn, and Thorp. Small sample sizes in these communities may impact data accuracy.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2019, Table B17024

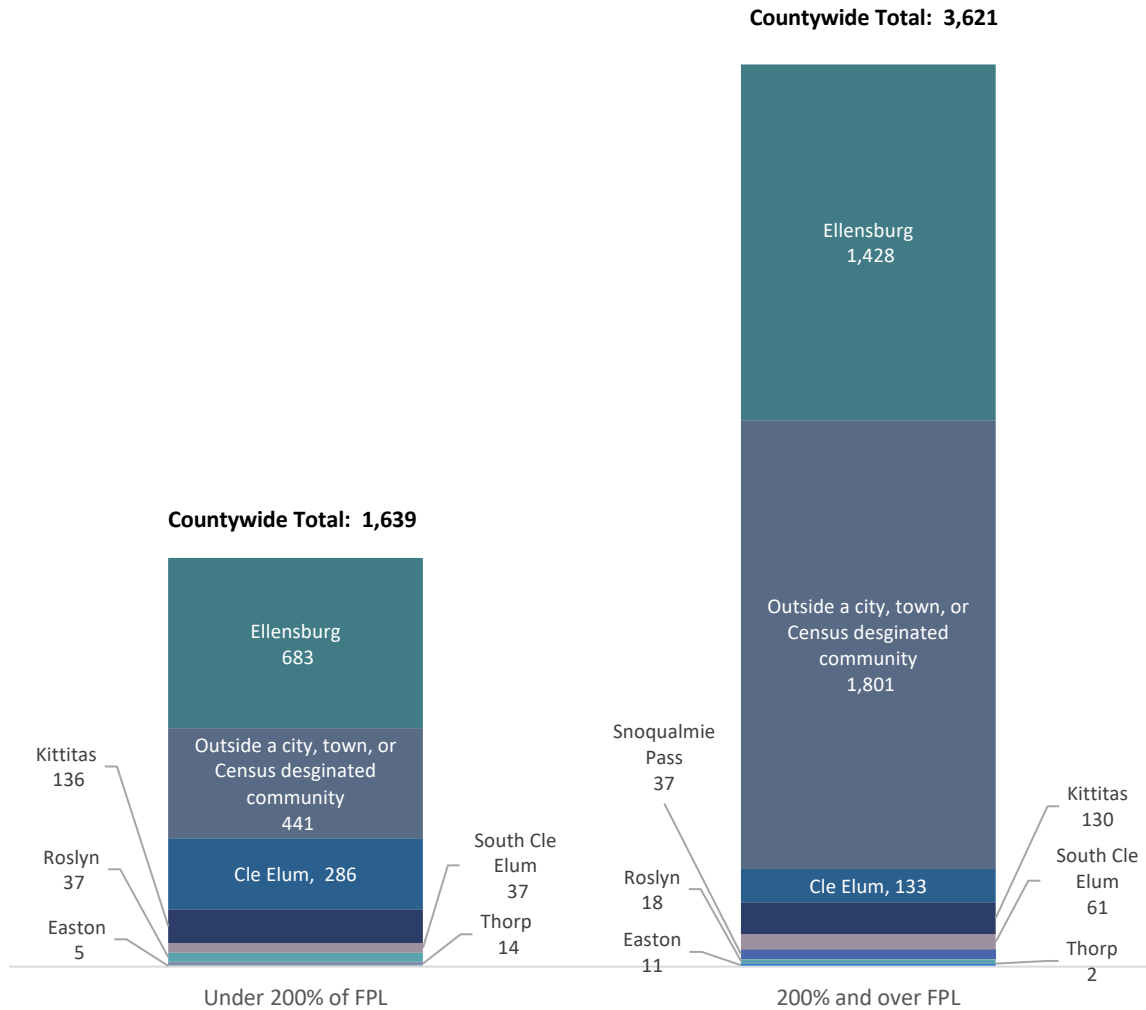
WORKING CONNECTIONS SUBSIDIES

A family is eligible for a Working Connections child care subsidy if, at initial application, they earn under 200 percent FPL. As shown in Figure 25, in Kittitas County, there are 1,639 children ages 0-11 living in families with incomes under 200 percent of the poverty threshold. Nearly all children in Thorp are eligible for subsidized care; 87.5 percent of children in Thorp live in families with incomes under 200 percent FPL. Cle Elum and Roslyn also have high rates of children with low income (68.3% and 67.3%, respectively).

“In Thorp, we have a large low-income community, but we don’t have any low-income housing. We’ve had homeless families and nowhere to provide for them. Low-income housing with a child care center and some afterschool programming would be awesome.” – Community Stakeholder

1,639 CHILDREN POTENTIALLY ELIGIBLE FOR WORKING CONNECTIONS SUBSIDY

Figure 25. Count of Children Under Ages 0-11 Years Living Below or Above 200% of the Poverty Threshold by City and Kittitas County, 2019

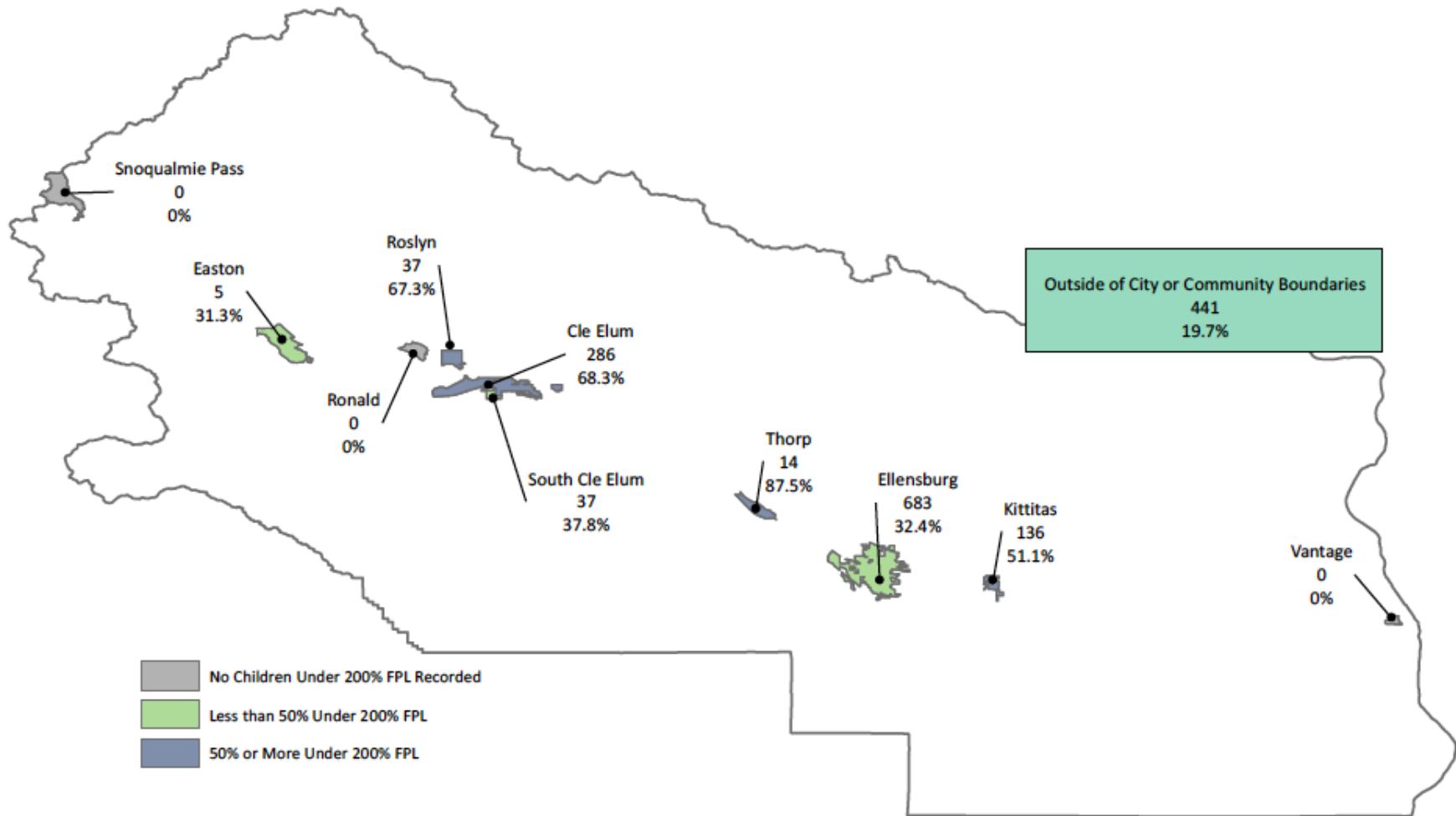


Note: The data reflect children for whom poverty status was determined. The source reported no children ages 0-11 living below 200% of the poverty threshold in the communities of Ronald, Snoqualmie Pass, and Vantage, and no children living 200% or over the poverty threshold in the communities of Ronald and Vantage. Small sample sizes in these communities may impact data accuracy.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2019

THORP, CLE ELUM, AND ROSLYN HAVE HIGHEST PROPORTIONS OF CHILDREN WITH LOW INCOME

Figure 26. Children Under 12 Years of Age who Live Under 200% Federal Poverty Level (Number, Percent) in Kittitas County Cities, 2019



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2019

KEY FINDING: The percentage of providers accepting Working Connections subsidies has decreased, with providers citing burdensome administrative requirements and low reimbursement rates.

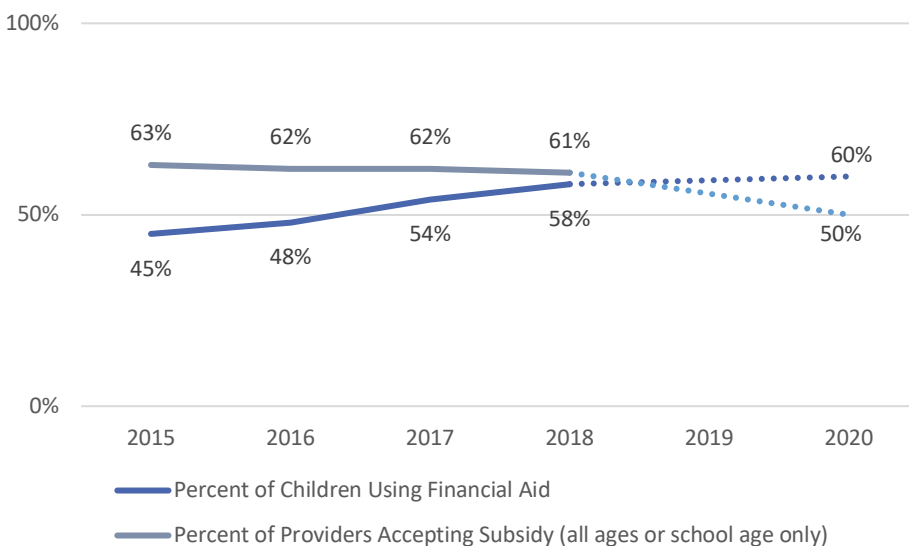
As shown in Figure 27, as of 2020, 60 percent of children in care used subsidies and 50 percent of providers accepted subsidies. The percentage of providers accepting subsidies has declined over time, but meanwhile, the percentage of children using care has increased. The proportion of providers accepting subsidies for school-age only is increasing, while the proportion accepting all ages is decreasing. As discussed in more detail below, this is likely attributable to findings about poor reimbursement rates for early care and education ages.

“The [subsidy-related] changes to WAC were in 2017/18. Some reactionary people just said, “I’m out.” But this is the first year of seeing it implemented.” – Community Stakeholder

Working Connections has a structure to avoid the “benefits cliff” and to provide more predictability to providers, who can be assured that a subsidy will not be suddenly revoked from a family that earns too much. However, some parents report that they don’t want to earn more for fear of losing their subsidy. Given the high cost of care, parents earning over 200 percent FPL are still in need a subsidy to afford care.

WHILE PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN USING SUBSIDIES HAS INCREASED, PERCENTAGE OF PROVIDERS ACCEPTING THEM HAS DECREASED

Figure 27. Percent of Children Using Financial Aid and Percent of Providers Accepting Financial Aid, Kittitas County, 2015-2020



Note: 2019 data are under request and not currently available.

Source: Child Care Aware Child Care County Report (<https://childcareawarewa.org/advocacy/#data>)

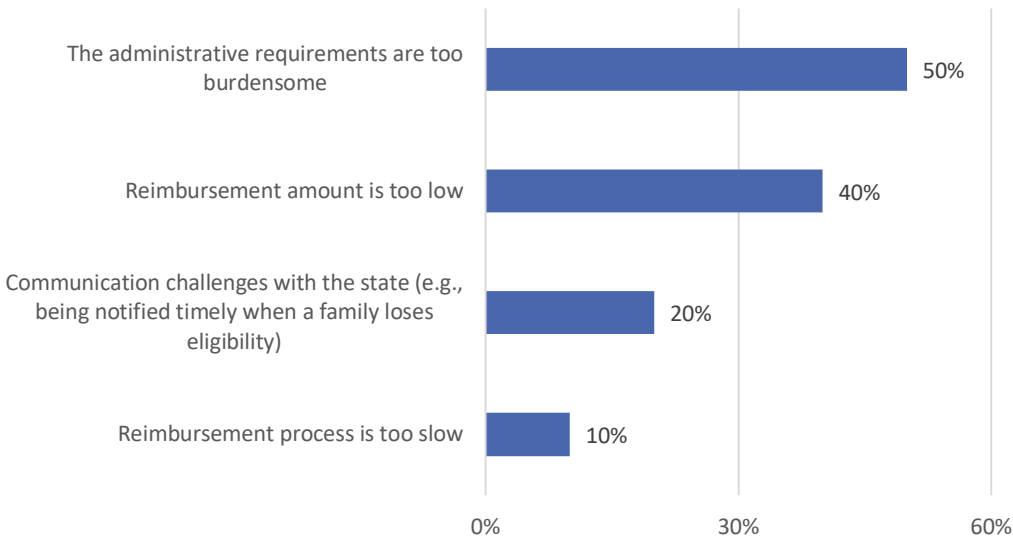
Among provider survey respondents, 59 percent did not currently provide subsidized child care slots, and 35 percent did. Among the six provider survey respondents that provided subsidized

slots, two had neutral experience participating in the program, and two each had positive or very positive experiences. No provider survey respondent offered employer subsidized child care slots or received any support from employers to lower the cost for their employees.

Among provider survey respondents that did not provide subsidized slots, half suggested that the administrative requirements are too burdensome.

ADMINISTRATIVE REQUIREMENTS ARE A BARRIER TO PROVIDING SUBSIDIES

Figure 28. Percent of providers not offering subsidized slots by reason (N=10)



Source: Kittitas Child Care Needs Assessment Survey

KEY FINDING: Insufficient subsidy reimbursement rates for infant and toddler care is a barrier to providers' accepting subsidies for infants and toddlers.

Providers' reports of insufficient reimbursement rates are corroborated by research released in July 2020 in the Washington Child Care Industry Assessment, which found, for example, that even though infant subsidy rates are on average nearly 30 percent higher than preschool subsidy rates, they are still insufficient to cover the cost of care for an infant at the initial tier of licensed Early Achievers level of care. In Region 2, which includes Kittitas County, only 59 percent of the cost of infant care is estimated to be covered by child care subsidy for providers at the licensed Early Achievers level. Coverage at the toddler level is also insufficient, estimated at 72 percent. The insufficiency of coverage is even greater at the higher levels of Early Achievers; at Tier 3, just 43 percent of the cost of caring for an infant is covered in Region 2 and 53 percent of the cost of care for a toddler. While the subsidy system pays a 7 percent increase for providers operating at Tier 3, this is insufficient to cover the additional costs of providing care at this standard. The report authors surmise that this mismatch creates a disincentive for providers to provide subsidized care for infants and toddlers.¹⁶

¹⁶ Washington Department of Commerce, Washington Child Care Industry Assessment, Volume III: Child Care Cost Model Report, July 2020 (<https://deptofcommerce.app.box.com/s/ga5pjenntvgtx1t149ymm1nm1umzwek>)

“The cost of providing infant care is not profitable so providers don’t do it anymore because of low state reimbursement. It’s a Catch-22 because parents can’t pay more.” – Community Stakeholder

KEY FINDING: There is an estimated 1 child care slot accepting Working Connections for approximately 4 eligible children in Kittitas County.

Given data available at the time of publication, while the percentage of providers accepting subsidies is known, it was unclear how many of the 854 licensed slots (or 592 accepted slots) accept subsidies in Kittitas County.¹⁷ However, an estimate can be calculated. In 2020, 50 percent of the 18 licensed providers operating in Kittitas County accepted subsidies, down from 63 percent in 2013. If slots were distributed evenly among providers, this would suggest that only half of the 854 licensed slots – or 427 slots – were open to a child with a subsidy. This provides a rough estimate that there is 1 subsidized slot for approximately 4 eligible children in the county.

OTHER ACCESS BARRIERS

Focus group participants and interviewees discussed two additional access barriers – how families find out about child care options and transportation, particularly for children needing transportation between child care (preschool and child care or Head Start and child care) and between school and out-of-school time care.

KEY FINDING: Word of mouth is a key means of finding out about child care options; stakeholders indicate a need for more systematic information and referral resources.

Families use a variety of means to explore child care options. Stakeholders note that Child Care Aware has a phone number to contact for help in accessing child care, but that many of the options provided lack capacity. Families often rely on word of mouth and social media to find out about unlicensed care including family providers and unlicensed preschools. Several family respondents expressed appreciation for word-of-mouth referrals but acknowledged that this leaves families reliant on informed contacts; families that don’t know other people with child care needs or who are new to the area may not receive word of mouth recommendations. Moreover, searching for both licensed and unlicensed care often relies on information available online, and families that aren’t technologically savvy may struggle to connect with care. Stakeholder feedback suggests a need for a more centralized and comprehensive resource guide that includes licensed and vetted, unlicensed options such as preschools.

RECOMMENDATION: Develop systematic options for child care access and referral resources. Stakeholders suggest increased marketing for the Catholic Charities/Child Care Aware resource hotline and other child care resources so families know what may be available to them in a more formal way. Additionally, stakeholders recommended considerations of expanded options like mobile resource centers, collaborating with community health workers, and family engagement specialists to effectively provide child care information.

¹⁷ Slot counts do not include EHS, HS or ECEAP.

KEY FINDING: Transportation barriers may limit child care options.

Many families rely on commuter buses and Central Transit to access child care. Although some child care providers, especially those connected to school districts, offer limited transportation, stakeholders indicated a desire for more transportation for preschoolers.

RECOMMENDATION: Explore opportunities to expand transportation options to support child care access and attendance. Stakeholders recommended consideration of staff and infrastructure funding, collaboratively with school and transportation partners, to support increased access to needed transportation.

QUALITY

Washington State is a leader in child care quality work nationally. The state has developed significant infrastructure in terms of programs, policies, and procedures to support quality child care.

- Washington has **foundational quality standards** to promote the development, health, and safety of children receiving child care in center and family home child care programs.¹⁸
- The Department of Children Youth and Families, State of Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, and Thrive by Five Washington maintain the **Washington State Early Learning and Development Guidelines Birth through 3rd Grade** describing behaviors and skills children may demonstrate in this period of life and how caregivers and early educators can support children’s healthy development.¹⁹
- **Early Achievers**, the state’s Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS) systemically supports child care quality improvement and provides families information to understand their child care provider’s quality of care.
- **Child care licensing** forms the foundation for quality and the Early Achievers QRIS.
- Washington also supports quality child care through the **Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP)**, which is funded by the state for 3- and 4-year-olds, **Head Start**, which is federally funded for 3- to 5-year-olds, and **Early Head Start**, which is for pregnant mothers and children from birth to 3 years old). Both programs are income tested with limited enrollment above the income limit (up to 10 percent) if children or families have certain vulnerability or risk factors.

The state updated the Washington Administrative Code (WAC) in 2019 to better align and crosswalk between the multiple quality standards and initiatives.

PARENT PERSPECTIVE ON CHILD CARE QUALITY

Researchers obtained parent and caregiver perspectives on the quality of child care available in Kittitas County through the survey and parent focus groups. All participating parents (survey and focus group) with their child(ren) in care reported using licensed providers.

¹⁸ WAC 110-300-0005 Definitions, Foundational Quality Standards (<https://app.leg.wa.gov/wac/default.aspx?cite=110-300-0005&pdf=true>)

¹⁹ https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pubs/EL_0015.pdf

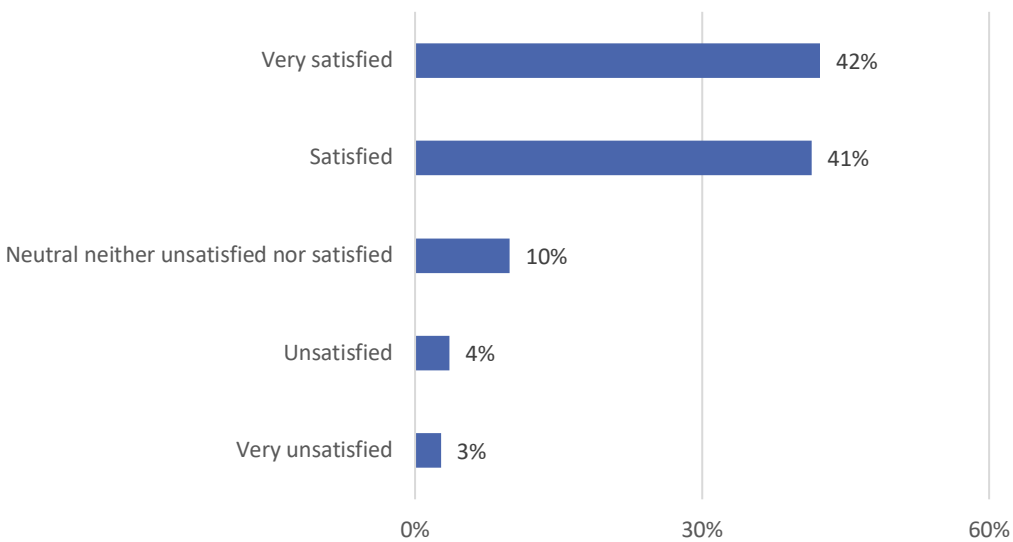
KEY FINDING: Families with children in care are satisfied with the care quality.

Over 80 percent of parents with children in care reported being satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of care provided to their children. Focus group respondents mirrored this sentiment for licensed early care and education providers as well as the Youth Center. Parent focus group participants with children in care reflected on child care providers’ effective communication practices and supportive environments.

This high level of satisfaction with quality, when combined with the finding shown in Figure 22 that accessing quality care was a top barrier for parents when they are looking for child care, suggests parents struggle to access quality child care, but once they are in care, they are satisfied with its quality.

MOST PARENTS WITH CHILDREN IN CARE WERE SATISFIED WITH CARE QUALITY

Figure 29. Percent of parent respondents with children in care by satisfaction with care quality (N=111)



Source: Kittitas Child Care Needs Assessment Survey

CHILD CARE LICENSING

Licensing provides the baseline for protecting the health and safety of children in care, and includes requirements related to the physical environment, caregiver background checks, caregiver training, group size, and emergency preparedness.

KEY FINDING: Lack of universal child care licensing requirements impacts the number of children in unregulated, potentially low-quality care, creates an uneven playing field for providers, and reduces access for families eligible for subsidies.

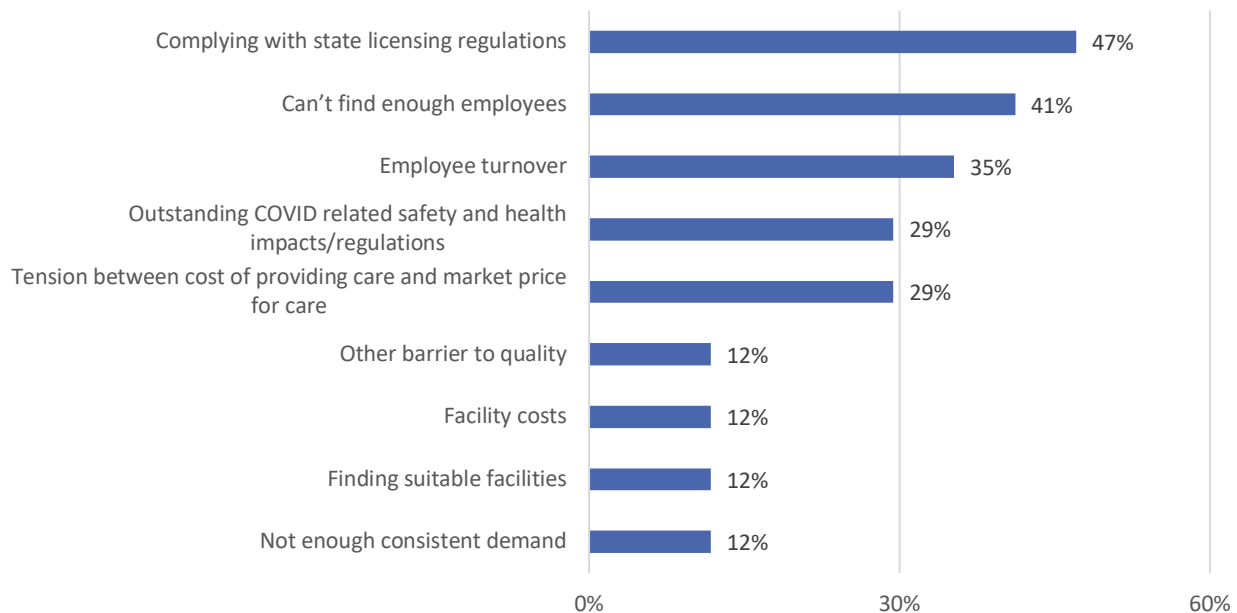
Washington State law includes a number of licensing exemptions, including for care in settings where no child is enrolled for more than four hours per day (part-time and drop-in care), care provided in school settings for school-age children (out-of-school time care and preschool),

seasonal camps, and care provided by family, friends, and neighbors.²⁰ Providers must be licensed or certified to receive child care subsidies. Kittitas County’s relatively low child care capacity paired with high demand means providers may not need to accept subsidies to fill their slots.

Provider survey respondents cited a range of barriers to providing quality care, including complying with state licensing regulations and an inability to find enough employees.

PROVIDERS CITE LICENSING COMPLIANCE AS BARRIER TO QUALITY

Figure 30. Percent of provider survey respondents by barriers to providing quality care (N=17)



Source: Kittitas Child Care Needs Assessment Survey

Interviewees, focus group respondents, and providers responding to a Facebook post about their experiences with licensing shared numerous challenges they experienced with child care licensing, including the punitive culture. Many reported that they left the field entirely because of licensing frustrations.

“I am not planning to do child care now. Having worked at a child care center, it was obvious the licensers were not really interested in the wellbeing of the children. Just busy finding something to change so it looked like they were doing their job.” – Former ECE Provider

“I used to work at a daycare in Ellensburg. It was fabulous! We struggled to keep up with the licensing nuances – it was SO much!! Licensing took more of a punitive approach – my boss was forced to close.” – Former ECE Provider

Others decided to not become a licensed provider, rather choosing to operate unlicensed.

“I did private child care in my home for 6+ years. I was not licensed. Licensing is a huge process with very strict home requirements. Things like windows,

²⁰ RCW 43.216.010 Licensing exemptions (<https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=43.216.010>)

fencing, chimneys/fireplaces, etc. are all inspected. You are required to make upgrades out of pocket, and that's just one small piece. Since you are licensed, you are also expected to accept the government payment vouchers which is another learning curve. USDA lunches are also expected. Once you do all that, you are still expected to charge a competitive rate, with no guarantee of payment.” – ECE Provider

Unlicensed care can be high quality, but it can also be unsafe. Without oversight, particularly in part-time, drop-in care, and unlicensed family, friend, and neighbor care, there is no way to know.

“I had to entrust another working mom I didn't know well to watch my first child. I have clients who trust their neighbors to watch their kids. Later we've had to make reports of abuse or neglect. Or there's one person watching 10 kids, so they aren't being watched well.” – Health Provider

KEY FINDING: Licensing regulations are harder for family home providers to implement.

Early childhood education stakeholders reflected on how 2019 child care licensing updates to the WAC align center and family home child care rules. This parity in rules has made it harder for family home child care providers. *“The new licensing is even worse than before as they make the laws the same for centers and in-home care providers (ECE Provider).”*

Barriers to licensing can be particularly acute for small, family home providers, who may not have resource capacity to address all immediate facility or environmental requirements.

“They are basically doing away with in-home style child care, making in-home licensing rules the same as center licensing rules. It makes it almost impossible to run out of your home, and still have your home be a home. The requirements are very exhausting, especially if you work on your own.” – ECE Provider

Background checks are required for everyone over 16 years old in the home. The state implemented an extensive waiver process when there are circumstances that prohibit someone from getting a background check and do not endanger children. Family home providers may need support in successfully obtaining these waivers when warranted.

KEY FINDING: Child care licensing implementation is inconsistent.

Licensors receive limited early childhood training, and many do not have early childhood backgrounds. A former licensor discussed how the focus was mostly on safe environments. Diverse licensor backgrounds and experience have contributed to inconsistent approaches to implementing licensing regulations. Recent WAC updates were intended to address inconsistencies, but stakeholder input suggests inconsistencies persist.

“Technicalities seem more important than the quality in terms of licensing decisions.” – Community Stakeholder

KEY FINDING: Fire, sanitation, and zoning requirements can further complicate child care licensing.

Fire regulations are locally driven and are inconsistent across the state. The Fire Marshal has precedence over child care licensing regulations, and fire requirements can contradict WAC, causing confusion and challenges for child care providers trying to implement fire and child care

licensing regulations at the same time. A work group is trying to find opportunities for increased alignment and coordination.

Sanitation requirements are designed to address conditions that could impact the health and welfare of children in care, and include hand hygiene, exclusion of ill people, environmental sanitation, and diapering. These requirements have been enhanced as a result of COVID and can add cost and staff resource burden for child care providers.

Zoning and homeowners' associations can create barriers to opening a center or family home child care business. Early childhood stakeholders are working with County Commissioners regarding zoning issues.

"Licensing is hard enough, and once you figure it out, you realize you don't meet city/county regulations." – ECE Provider

RECOMMENDATION: Provide pre-licensing and licensing technical support to child care providers. Individuals considering entering the child care field would benefit from one-on-one assistance as they navigate the startup process. This could include navigating licensing and professional development requirements. Regions throughout the state have groups that help providers become licensed. The Kittitas Early Learning Coalition's scope provides other provider supports but does not have pre-licensing support within its scope. Central Washington University could be an additional licensing support resource. There could also be opportunities for more responsive and frequent communication with existing providers related to licensing. Communication and process improvements could encourage greater provider participation in licensing.

"I saw your post about becoming a licensed day care. I'd love all the info you have because I've often considered doing this. Especially knowing that there are not enough of them around our area." – Community Stakeholder

"I do want more info. I don't know where to start honestly." – Community Stakeholder

RECOMMENDATION: Provide financial support for potential and expanding providers to meet licensing requirements. Financial support, including incentives, enhanced start up grants, and expansion grants could address infrastructure needs such as better fencing, playground equipment, sleep mats, or freezers to keep snacks, that may impede licensing.

"I know a number of upper county churches have tried to open up daycares, but they run into licensing regulations and high expense to get this started. Maybe resources to help with expenses and navigators to help with the process could help, along with maybe lessening the regulations." – Parent

RECOMMENDATION: Evaluate fire, sanitation, and zoning requirements. Analyze county and local community regulations, policies, and processes related to fire, sanitation, and zoning to identify areas for increased alignment and coordination with child care licensing requirements. Work with local stakeholders to enhance or redesign how these critical components support the shared goal of child and provider health and safety.

RECOMMENDATION: Advocate for elimination of licensing exemptions. Universal licensing requirements would promote a higher level of quality care and level the playing field across provider types. It would also increase access to care options for families eligible for child care

subsidies. This may require increased reciprocity between Head Start, tribal CCDF, and state child care licensing.

QRIS/EARLY ACHIEVERS

Early Achievers, Washington’s QRIS, is designed to promote accessible, high quality early care and education opportunities so children are ready to start kindergarten successfully. Early Achievers uses a five-level rating system, with Level 1 being licensing or certification; Level 2 being professional growth and program management; and Levels 3-5 being evaluation and rating in the Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ERS-R), Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), and Quality Standard areas.

Washington encourages child care provider participation in Early Achievers through various approaches, including linking licensing and subsidy receipt to Early Achievers participation in WAC, coaching services, infant-toddler consultation, professional development scholarships, substitute pool, need-based grants, tiered subsidy reimbursement, and quality improvement awards.

KEY FINDING: Linkage of subsidies with Early Achievers has decreased provider interest in participating in both programs, particularly for family home ECE providers.

The linkage of subsidies with Early Achievers causes delays in a program’s ability to accept subsidies, since providers need to be rated at a Level 3 or higher to receive subsidy payments. Programs can apply for this rating in their second year of Early Achievers participation, delaying providers’ ability to accept subsidies for at least a year from enrollment. Interviewees, focus group participants, and survey respondents discussed how this linkage has a more negative impact on family home care providers because they have less capacity to meet Early Achievers requirements. This in turn results in decreased access to family home care options for families using subsidies.

“I no longer take subsidies as an in-home provider because of the linkage to Early Achievers. I used to. I’d have to go through Early Achievers class – someone comes every single month to audit what you do and you have to go in front of a panel to get approved. With all the different ages, and yet Early Achievers has one way – and they grade you, spending hours, watching you. I’ve done it so long and I know what works. The subsidy pay is so low, and the centers are set up better to meet the expectations of Early Achievers.” – ECE Provider

“Early Achievers has a great goal, but it hinders access because of the requirements. I took kids with subsidies for 25 years, and no home daycares take the subsidies that I know of now. They should direct the 10 hours already required to take the specific classes they want us to take, rather than expecting a college degree. People who are interested in opening a daycare, I walk them through what it takes and they say, never mind!” – ECE Provider

“I did the quality rating program and got grants, but anyone who chose not to do the quality program missed out on grants. It’s a bummer – anyone who cares for children should be part of the quality program. It’s a lot of time and can be stressful especially for home programs because you have multiple ages and have

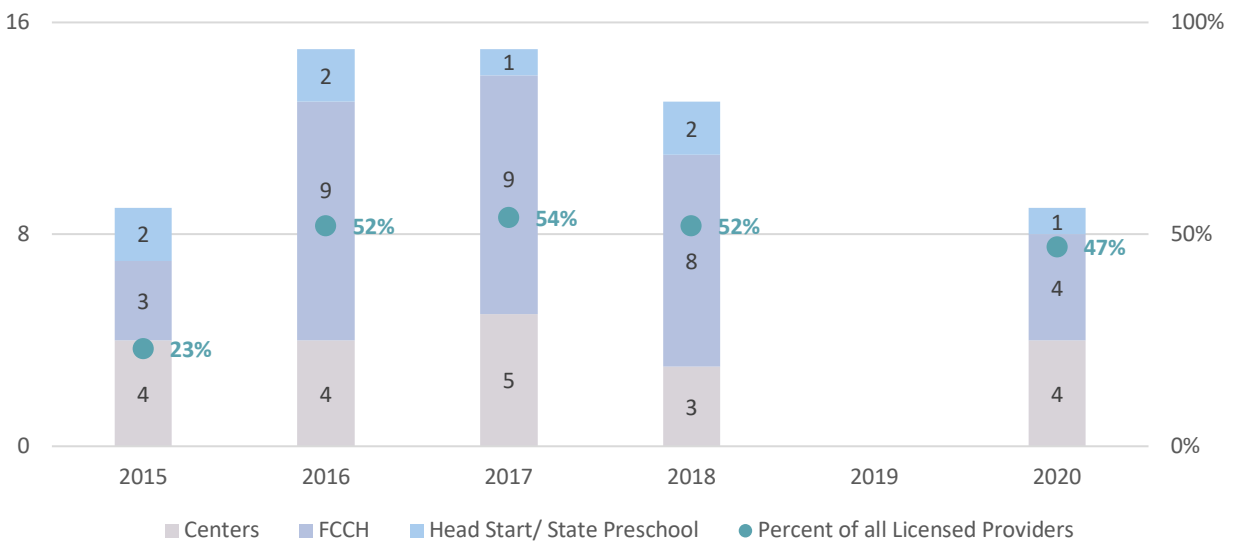
to have quality materials for each age. For example, beads aren't safe for infants but need to be accessible for preschoolers. A lot of home programs don't do it for that reason.” – ECE Provider

KEY FINDING: Fewer Kittitas County child care providers are participating in Early Achievers.

Just under half of Kittitas County licensed providers are enrolled in Early Achievers (4 centers, 4 family home providers, and the County’s one ECEAP program/state preschool). Kittitas County’s Head Start program does not participate in Early Achievers, despite most Head Start programs doing so. Early Achievers participation in Kittitas County has decreased over time from a high of 15 providers (54 percent) in 2017. The percentage of participating providers has only decreased by five percent, which demonstrates a decrease in the number of licensed providers in the county.

EARLY ACHIEVERS PARTICIPATION IS DECLINING

Figure 31. Number and Percent of Providers Participating in Early Achievers in Kittitas County, 2015-2020



Note: 2019 data are under request and not currently available.

Source: Child Care Aware Child Care County Report (<https://childcareawarewa.org/advocacy/#data>)

KEY FINDING: Early Achievers education and training requirements may dissuade program participation.

Several providers commented on how the increase in early childhood educator educational requirements have caused them to lose valuable educators. Providers had inconsistent information about whether and how experience could be used to meet educational requirements. Others remarked on the challenges in maintaining training requirements, particularly with the high turnover rate many child care providers experience. *“The classes you have to take for star credits can be a hassle (ECE Provider).”*

RECOMMENDATION: Support consistent, clear messaging about Early Achievers with providers. Increasing awareness of Early Achievers, its financial benefits, and how experience can replace educational attainment could grow provider participation in Early Achievers and subsidies.

RECOMMENDATION: Collaborate with other early education stakeholders to modify regulations, policies, and processes to better support family home provider participation in Early Achievers. As Kittitas County stakeholders work to increase child care capacity in the region, family home providers are an important piece of the puzzle. It will be important to engage them in the quality and equity infrastructure components of the early learning system. Stakeholders should advocate for state level changes to ensure these providers are not pushed out of the system.

READINESS FOR KINDERGARTEN

Kindergarten readiness is an indicator for future academic and social success. Children who are developmentally ready when they start kindergarten are more likely to graduate high school, compete for higher paying jobs, and reduce reliance on expensive social services. Measures of kindergarten readiness are evidence of the quality of children’s early childhood experiences. A child’s readiness can be influenced by many experiences, including the quality of their relationships, the presence or absence of trauma or maltreatment, or whether they experienced material deprivation (e.g., poverty). There is also a strong research-supported link between high-quality ECE experiences and improved kindergarten readiness. Considering this research, a common best practice is to increase access to high-quality ECE to improve kindergarten readiness. While many factors influence a child’s readiness for school, measures of kindergarten readiness can act as a proxy for measuring children’s access to high-quality ECE, as well as for measuring positive early childhood experiences overall.

The means of measuring kindergarten readiness is generically referred to as a kindergarten readiness assessment (KRA). The assessment measures children’s readiness upon entry to kindergarten. The assessment is completed by kindergarten teachers who observe the students and use a standardized tool to rate each student in several developmental domains, including fine and gross motor skills, numeracy and literacy skills, and socio-emotional skills.

In Washington State, the KRA is called the Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills, or WaKIDS. WaKIDS was piloted in 2010/11 and implemented in volunteer schools in 2011/12. It became mandatory in state-funded full-day kindergarten in 2012/13, and was scaled up incrementally each succeeding year, prioritizing schools with the highest percentages of students receiving free or reduced-price meals. As of 2017/18, full-day kindergarten and WaKIDS is statewide.

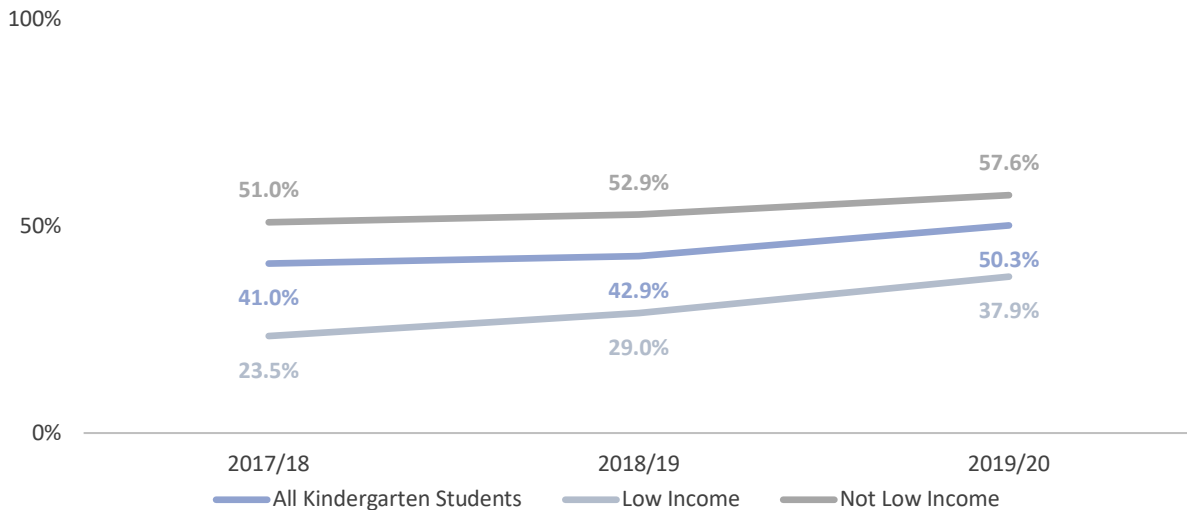
KEY FINDING: More children are assessed as entering kindergarten ready to learn.

As shown in Figure 32, since full implementation of WaKIDS in 2017-18, an increasing percentage of children are ready for kindergarten. There is a readiness gap between students living in households with low incomes compared to their peers who are not low-income.

Interviewees and focus group participants discussed how some providers, particularly unlicensed options, provide service more akin to daycare or babysitting versus high quality early learning and development services to children and families.

KINDERGARTEN READINESS IS IMPROVING, BUT CHILDREN WITH LOW INCOME EXPERIENCE PERSISTENT ACHIEVEMENT GAP

Figure 32. Percentage of Kindergarteners Ready for School in All Six Areas, Kittitas County, 2017/18 – 2019/20²¹



Source: Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Washington State Report Card (<https://washingtonstatereportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/>)

RECOMMENDATION: Improve equitable access to high quality early learning opportunities. Children living in households with low incomes in particular need access to continuous, high-quality early learning and development opportunities to close the achievement gap with their higher income peers.

KEY FINDING: The Kittitas Early Learning Coalition is an important asset for early childhood system collaboration, which supports more effective kindergarten transition.

Smooth transitions to kindergarten are a key component of kindergarten readiness. The transition from preschool to kindergarten is supported by making personal connections, aligning practices, engaging authentically with parents in the planning process, and sharing child data. Stakeholders consistently reflected on the important role the Early Learning Coalition plays in coordinating ECE and school-age educators, programs, and quality initiatives.

²¹ Data will not be available for 2020/21 due to the COVID-19 public health crisis. Data for Kittitas County have the following limitations due in part to small numbers of students in rural districts: only the school districts of Cle Elum-Roslyn, Kittitas, and Ellensburg are reflected in all years and all groups; data for Thorp School District are included in the “All Kindergarten Students” calculation for years 2017/18-2019/20, but income data were not available for Thorp; data for Damman School District are only present in the 2017/18 “All Kindergarten Students” calculation only; and data for Easton School District were not available.

“We want to continue to bridge the gap with schools because we’re building the foundation for kids. I want to make sure I’m teaching what is needed to get them ready.” – ECE Provider

Providers discussed how the Early Learning Coalition’s efforts have improved the quality of ECE and school-age care. Some stakeholders remarked how collaboration between early care and school-age care is very dependent on program and school district leadership, in which there is consistent turnover. Stakeholders lamented that COVID also weakened partnerships and hope the leadership group is resurrected in the 2021-22 school year.

A preschool teacher discussed the need to expand transition work to include transitions from toddler ECE to preschool settings.

“I know some of the other preschool teachers in Ellensburg, and I get a few of their kids each year. But there is not a system or direct contact, or information shared, or even information that comes with the child. It’s all kind of segmented.” – ECE Provider

RECOMMENDATION: Reinvigorate the Early Learning Coalition and relationship building efforts to increase coordination between ECE and school-age educators to improve the transition to kindergarten and preschool for children, families, and educators. The county can reinvest and build additional capacity in this local best practice to strengthen collective commitment and investment in quality early childhood education and effective transitions. This includes shared professional development opportunities for ECE through third grade educators.

STRUCTURAL SUPPORT FOR PROVIDERS TO PROMOTE QUALITY

Workforce is the foundation for capacity and quality – qualified, professional, motivated child care providers are essential in supporting positive child and family outcomes. While this topic was not included as a research question guiding the assessment, we include this section because workforce is the root cause of many of the child care system challenges experienced by families, child care providers, intersecting sector providers (health and family support), businesses, and community leaders. The two focal areas of this subsection are provider compensation and child care networks.

CHILD CARE PROVIDER COMPENSATION

KEY FINDING: Child care provider compensation impacts workforce stability and professionalization.

There is disparity between ECE and K-3 compensation. The 2020 Child Care Aware report shows a gap of approximately \$47,000 between a child care center teacher salary in Kittitas County’s region (\$25,800) and a statewide K-12 teacher (\$72,915).²² Despite recent pay increases, it is not enough to close the gap with public school teachers.

²² Child Care Aware of Washington, *Child Care in Kittitas County*, January 2021.

“The pay for providers is pretty low—it’s hard to make a career out of it. This makes it hard for people to enter the field or start centers.” – Community Stakeholder

Without sustained public funding for ECE provision, most providers will continue to rely on family fees as the primary source of their operating budget. This dynamic pressures providers to keep costs as low as possible, limiting their ability to increase staff compensation, and perpetuating ongoing staff turnover and instability. This instability in staffing is not only administratively challenging for providers, but impacts quality of care for children, who benefit from continuity of care. Moreover, low compensation and limited benefits hinder prospective workers from viewing ECE provision as a long-term career, limiting their incentive to participate in ongoing professional development opportunities to increase the quality of their care.

“If we’re thinking big, I would love to see early childhood teachers compensated better and see this in turn reflect on higher retention/lower turnover.” – Parent

At the family level, providers stated that family income levels often hinder families’ ability to afford tuition of licensed child care providers and encourages some parents to turn to family members or informal, unlicensed providers for care. Without public outreach regarding the benefits of high-quality care, family members may not appreciate the cost differential in delivering high-quality care; moreover, families may be unable to pay for higher quality care even if they recognize the benefits.

KEY FINDING: Some school-based preschools are addressing pay parity through certification and classification requirements.

Some Kittitas County public schools are using certified teachers in school-based preschools, which allows them to move teachers around the schools based to work where most needed. Seattle created a new classification for preschool teachers, which is close in qualifications to a certified educator.

RECOMMENDATION: Increase public and family awareness on the benefits of high-quality care. Increased awareness will create more informed consumers of child care options, increasing families’ ability to judiciously seek higher quality care within their income limits.

RECOMMENDATION: Continue to participate in efforts to align the provider pay scale across the birth to elementary continuum. Increasing early educator compensation will positively impact recruitment, retention, and quality. The American Rescue Plan Act and Washington Fair Start for Kids Act provide unprecedented opportunity to invest in early learning and development. Meaningfully and sustainably investing in the workforce is a foundational requirement for early learning and development success. To this end, providers recommended analyzing required education and experience across the early care and education system to work toward aligned pay on a shared scale.

RECOMMENDATION: Analyze approaches options for apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs and how to transition students in training into paid careers. Kittitas County benefits from having local and regional higher education programs with early learning and development focuses. Apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships provide education and experience-based training through mentor-supported on-the-job training and college-level classroom instruction. County leadership could work with ECE providers, colleges, high schools, and other Department of Commerce suggested mechanisms to develop or promote apprenticeship and pre-

apprenticeship opportunities for students. The County could look to the West Valley High School in Yakima as a pre-apprenticeship model.

CHILD CARE NETWORKS

Kittitas County child care providers discussed how the Early Learning Coalition promotes strong collaboration across early learning providers in addition to its efforts to network with school districts. Providers discussed the coalition as a tool more used by center directors to connect and collaborate, versus family home providers.

KEY FINDING: Staffed family child care networks are considered one of the most effective strategies to support in-home care providers.

Research has found that home-based child care providers affiliated with staffed family child care networks offer higher quality than providers not affiliated with networks.²³ Because children from families who have low-incomes and who are dual language learners tend to receive care more commonly in lower cost home-based child care and also benefit more from high quality ECE than their more advantaged peers, improving the quality of family home care is vital for their health, development, and wellbeing.²⁴ Networks offer peer support and learning opportunities, assistance with business and administrative services including shared services, and research-based supports. Child Care Aware provides regional child care resource network services in Washington. It is not clear how much focus Child Care Aware places on supporting this segment of the provider population.

RECOMMENDATION: Consider implementing a family child care network to support family home provider capacity and quality. Local or regional early childhood stakeholders could look at the feasibility of having a staffed child care network for home-based care providers to support their capacity, quality, and sustainability.

RECOMMENDATION: Explore the micro-center network hub model as an option to increase capacity with multiple, one-classroom ECE ‘centers’ located in other facilities such as public schools, hospitals, office buildings, or community centers, minimizing facility costs. Administrative services and provider supports are centralized.

²³ Erikson Institute, “Mapping the Family Child Care Network Landscape: Findings from the National Study of Family Child Care Networks,” 2019 (https://www.erikson.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/FCC-Network-Landscape_Executive-Summary_Erikson-Institute_Jan2019.pdf)

²⁴ National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance, “Staffed Family Child Care Networks: A Research-Informed Strategy for Supporting High-Quality Family Child Care,” 2017 (https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/fcc_networks_brief_0.pdf)

IMPACT OF CHILD CARE ACCESS ON WORKFORCE ATTACHMENT

Child care availability impacts parental workforce attachment and limits parents' ability to seek new jobs, request more hours, or pursue advancement. The pandemic has exacerbated this dynamic, with parents – particularly mothers – of young children disproportionately leaving the workforce or reducing their hours because of child care issues. In response to remote schooling and closed child care centers and schools, employers offered more flexible working arrangements to support parents during the pandemic; several of these pandemic policies may persist after the public health crisis has abated, but they are more likely to continue to be offered to administrative or non-frontline positions.

Like parents, businesses are negatively impacted by child care challenges which result in absenteeism among their workforce and challenges recruiting and retaining talent. Local employer family support benefits are limited, and most employers do not offer any direct child care assistance or subsidy. Yet Kittitas County parents are eager to access expanded family support benefits, suggesting opportunities for greater employer engagement in leading the investigation, assessment, and implementation of more creative child care solutions. Identifying a primary contact to serve as a business liaison to help employers navigate their options in providing child care and family benefits could support this movement.

UNEMPLOYMENT AND LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION

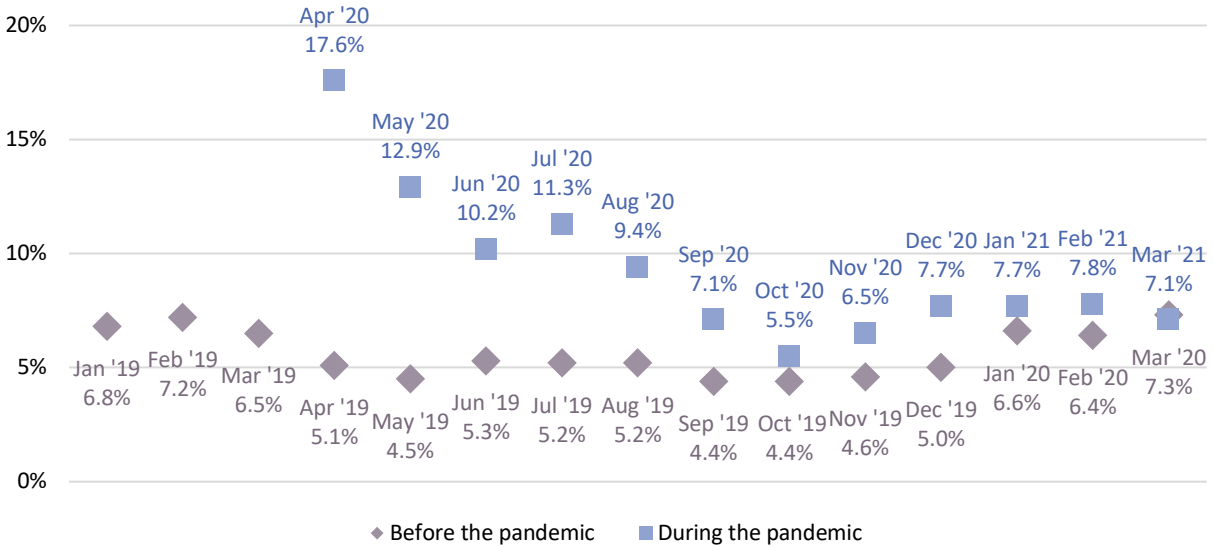
Demand for child care is driven in large part by parental employment ambitions. While not all families need or seek child care, parents who want or need to work will most likely need care. The employment and labor force data below provide context for understanding the overall trends in employment and labor force participation in Kittitas County; the data do not provide findings exclusively for workers with children ages 0-12 years.

KEY FINDING: Data show that the unemployment rate is returning to pre-pandemic levels, but there are still many who remain out of the labor force.

The improving unemployment rate is positive sign, but there are still roughly 2,500 Kittitas County pre-pandemic workers sitting on the sidelines, not seeking employment as of March 2021. As shown in sections on child care supply and demand, even with this drop in the labor force, a gap remains in the number of children with all available parents in the labor force and the number of child care slots, which have been reduced due to the pandemic.

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE NEARING PRE-PANDEMIC LEVELS

Figure 33. Unemployment Rate Before the Pandemic Compared to During the Pandemic, Kittitas County, January 2019-March 2021

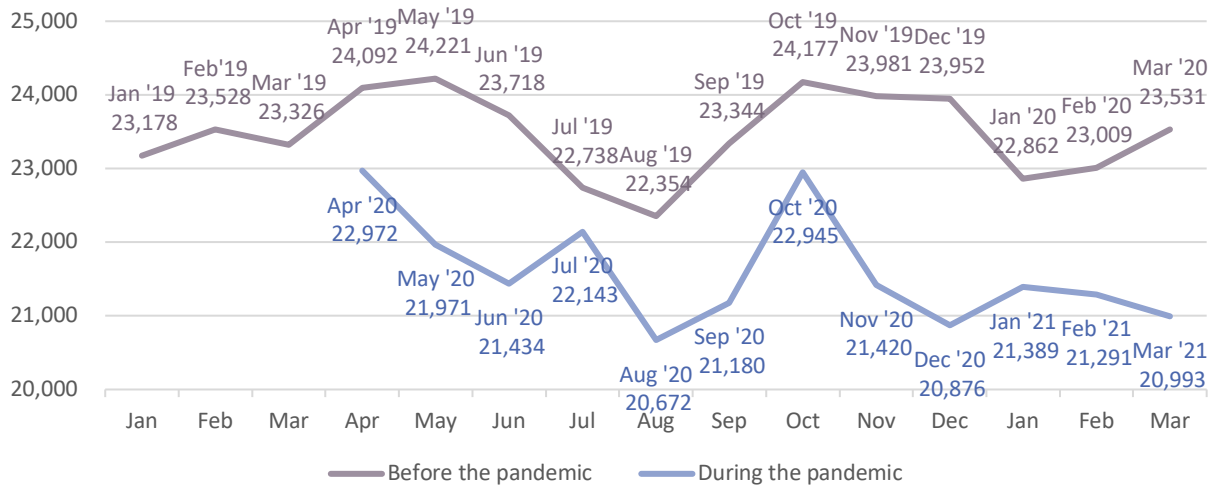


Note: March 2021 data are preliminary.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics (<https://www.bls.gov/lau/#data>)

OVER 2,500 LOCAL WORKERS STILL SITTING OUT OF THE WORKFORCE

Figure 34. Labor Force Before the Pandemic Compared to During the Pandemic, Kittitas County, January 2019-March 2021



Note: March 2021 data are preliminary.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics (<https://www.bls.gov/lau/#data>)

EMPLOYMENT STABILITY AND WORKFORCE ATTACHMENT

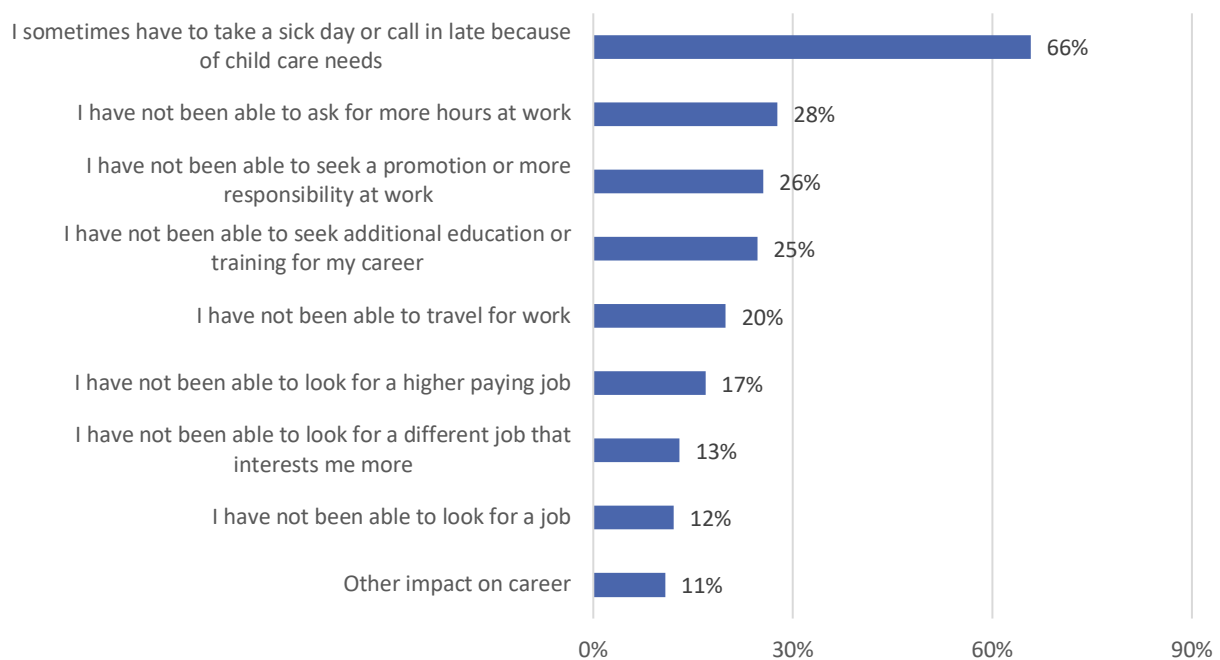
KEY FINDING: Child care availability impacts caregivers' workforce attachment, including their ability to seek work, increase hours, and pursue promotions.

Research finds that parental employment instability is correlated with negative academic and behavioral outcomes for children.²⁵ While many factors may contribute to employment instability among parents, there is evidence that the lack of access to child care is a primary contributor.²⁶

Stakeholder data collected in Kittitas County corroborates research findings. Caregiver survey respondents were asked to identify how child care challenges impacted their employment or career. Two-thirds of caregiver respondents identified their need to take a sick day or call in late to work because of child care needs as an impact. A quarter or more caregiver respondents cited not being able to ask for more hours at work (28%), not being able to seek a promotion or more responsibility (26%), or not being able to seek additional education or training for their career (25%).

CHILD CARE CHALLENGES IMPACT CAREGIVER ABSENTEEISM AT WORK

Figure 35. Impact of Child Care Challenge on Employment or Career (N=231)



Source: Kittitas Child Care Needs Assessment Survey

²⁵ Sandstrom, H. Huerta, S. (2013). The Negative Effects of Instability on Child Development: A Research Synthesis. *The Urban Institute, Low Income Working Families Discussion Paper 3*. Retrieved from www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/412899-The-Negative-Effects-of-Instability-on-Child-Development.pdf

²⁶ Schochet, Leila. (2019). The Child Care Crisis is Keeping Women Out of the Workforce. Center for American Progress. Retrieved from Sandstrom, H. Huerta, S. (2013). The Negative Effects of Instability on Child Development: A Research Synthesis. *The Urban Institute, Low Income Working Families Discussion Paper 3*. Retrieved from www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/412899-The-Negative-Effects-of-Instability-on-Child-Development.pdf

Families with lower incomes (less than \$50,000) were more likely to say that child care has impacted their ability to look for a job, to look for a higher paying job or a job that interests them, and their ability to ask for more hours at work. Caregivers with lower incomes were less likely to cite that they have not been able to seek a promotion at work or travel for work because of child care challenges, which may be related to their occupation and expected work responsibilities.

“When my children were younger, abrupt closure of child care venues and lack of alternatives made it extremely challenging to maintain a regular work schedule. I sometimes had to bring my kids to work with me, or call in late/sick, with both options negatively affecting my employment.” – Parent

Interview and focus group respondents cite examples of parents turning down jobs because of limited time to secure child care, and reducing hours due to lack of available child care. Several survey respondents noted that they or their spouse had to quit their jobs to attend to child care needs.

“I had to turn down a full-time job due to lack of affordable options.” – Parent

“I had to turn down a good paying job offer due to lack of availability of after school care.” – Parent

“I have had to reduce my hours at work because child care could not be found.” – Parent

One employer noted that they often have employees who leave the workforce, reduce to part-time, or sign up for on-call per diem to accommodate their child care needs. Though employers seek to offer less than full-time positions to address this dynamic, they note the impact of having to hire two positions—one full-time and one per diem as back up—to ensure coverage.

Additionally, stakeholders reflected that child care schedules are often misaligned with work schedules, decreasing viable employment opportunities for parents. It is very difficult to find care for nontraditional work hours, including overnight or evening shifts, and stakeholders indicate that even traditional work hours can be challenging as many child care centers do not open until 8:00 and require pick-up by 5:00, leaving no margin for parents to travel between the child care location and their place of employment.

KEY FINDING: The pandemic exacerbated barriers to workforce attachment that result from child care challenges but may have increased employer awareness and action.

Employment instability due to child care has only been exacerbated due to the pandemic – particularly for mothers. Recent national research shows that COVID has widened the gap in the labor force participation rate (LFPR) particularly for mothers of young children and single mothers:

“The COVID-19 pandemic has widened labor force participation gaps between mothers and fathers.²⁷ The labor force participation gap of mothers overall was about 3.5 percentage points lower in March 2021 than in January 2020, while fathers’ labor force participation gap was down 1 percentage point. Moreover, the age of the children in the household contributed to differences in labor force

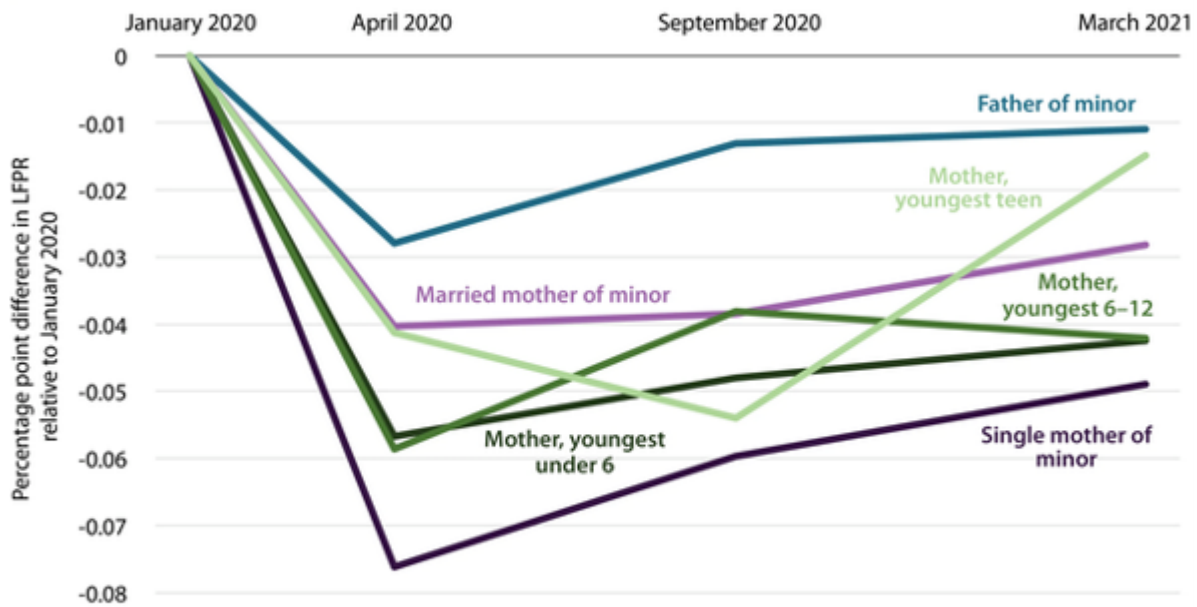
²⁷ Heggness, Misty. The immediate impact of the COVID-19 Shock on Parental Attachment to the Labor Market and the Double Bind of Mothers. Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis. Institute Working Paper 33. Revised October 26, 2020. Retrieved May 11, 2021. (minneapolisfed.org)

participation rates during the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁸ While labor force participation gaps of mothers whose youngest child is a teenager have rebounded to about 1.5 percentage points below its January 2020 level, mothers whose youngest children is under 13 are more than 4 percentage points below.

In January 2020, single mothers had the highest labor force participation gap of the female groups at just over 81 percent. Since then, the labor force participation gap fell the most among single mothers of the groups examined — with a decline of about 7.5 percentage points — and their rate has been the slowest to recover. As of March 2021, the labor force participation gap for single mothers is a full 5 percentage points below its January 2020 rate.²⁹

GAP IN LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE FOR MOTHERS OF YOUNG CHILDREN AND SINGLE MOTHERS WIDENED DURING THE PANDEMIC

Figure 36. Difference in Prime-Age Labor Force Participation Rates, January 2020 Baseline



Note: For each group, samples are restricted to the prime-age population (ages 25-54).

Source: Analysis by the Hamilton Project at the Brookings Institute of Bureau of Labor Statistics Current Population Survey data

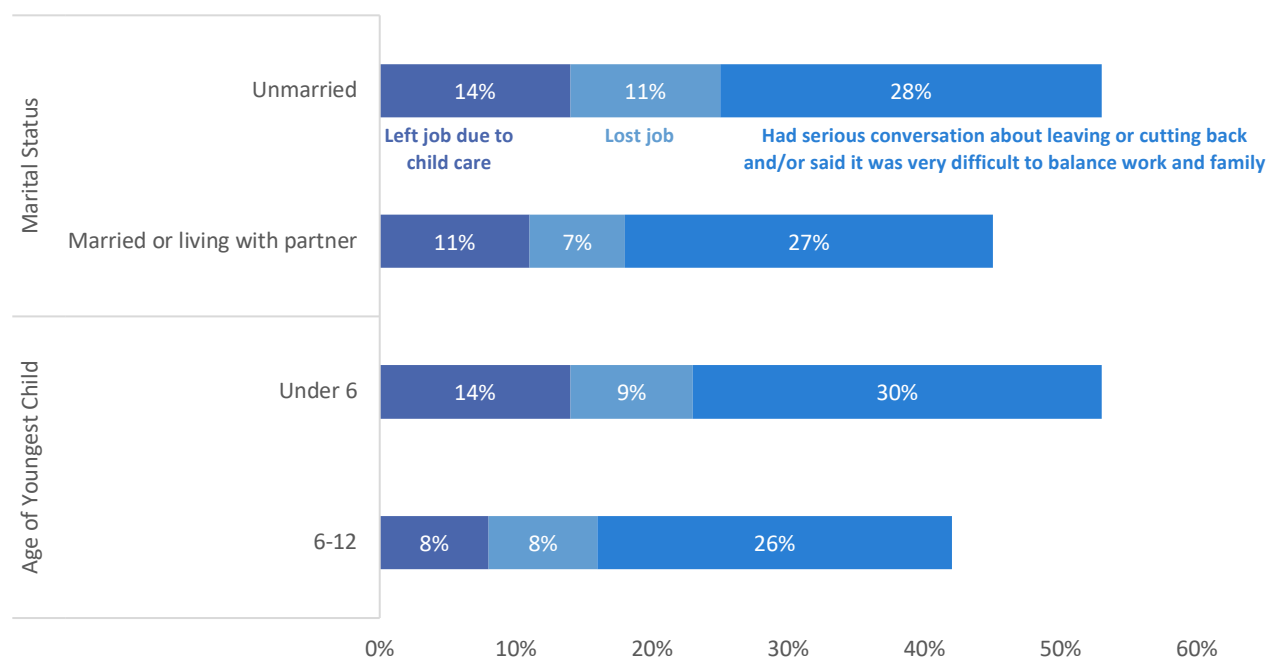
According to the Fall Survey of Young Mothers with Children, administered by Brookings in Fall 2020, a large share of employed mothers across all age groups expressed daily stresses related to child care. Mothers with children under six were more likely to report have a serious conversation about leaving their job or reducing their hours because of child care challenges and/or finding it very difficult to balance work and family responsibility.

²⁸ Edwards, Kathryn A. Sitting it out? Or pushed out? Women are leaving the labor force in record numbers. Rand Corporation. October 23, 2020. Retrieved May 11, 2021. (rand.org)

²⁹ Bauer, Lauren. Mothers are being left behind in the economic recovery from COVID-19. Brookings Institute. May 6, 2021. Retrieved May 11, 2021 (www.brookings.edu)

EMPLOYED MOTHERS EXPRESS MULTIPLE STRESSES RELATED TO CHILD CARE

Figure 37. Share of Mothers who Exited the Labor Force or Who Reported Difficulty in Staying Employed Due to Child Care, Fall 2020



Source: Analysis of the Hamilton Project at the Brookings Institute of Fall 2020 Survey of Mothers with Young Children

Remote schooling, child care closures, and continued work responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic exaggerated the workforce challenges working parents face. In a recent survey, 70 percent of mothers who were essential workers or working from home during the height of the pandemic reported that it was difficult to balance work and family. More than one in ten mothers of young children left their jobs due to child care responsibilities in some point in 2020, and during the COVID pandemic fewer working mothers with young children were working full-time. Indeed, after March 2020, parents of young children were more likely to leave the labor force compared to parents of teens.³⁰

“My mom and mother-in-law were switching out weeks to care for my child during COVID. I know my patients are experiencing this too. I have a client who is an essential worker who couldn’t find child care. She doesn’t have the resources we do as professionals.” – Parent

KEY FINDING: Flexible work options arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, including remote work, may persist indefinitely post-pandemic, but are likely to be available ongoing to a limited range of employment positions.

The pandemic significantly increased remote work and flexible work arrangements. Stakeholders noted increased opportunities for remote work and, in very limited cases, bringing children to the

³⁰ Bauer, L., and E. Buckner, S. Estep, E. Moss, and M. Welch. “Ten Economic Facts on How Mothers Spend Their Time.” Economic Facts. The Hamilton Project. March 2021.

workplace when school and child care centers shut down. However, these adaptations were not offered evenly across jobs or workplaces: some positions are unable to be performed remotely, and many workplace policies are at the discretion of each department.

“We've had requests to bring babies into the workplace but we looked into it and decided it was too much of a liability. We left it up to departments to make their choices. I think – though I'm not sure – that one department has allowed babies to be there part-time. With COVID, they saw more at home time. When kids are a little older, they can come to the [workplace] and hang out if necessary.” – Employer

Several stakeholders suggest that many of these adaptations, including remote work options and bringing children to the workplace, may continue post-pandemic, although they note that these accommodations may be easier for certain positions (e.g., administrative) versus others (e.g., front line production or essential workers). Some stakeholders suggest that the impact of child care challenges during the pandemic may raise awareness among employers and prompt advocacy by employers to help find flexible solutions.

“I think more employers recognize the child care gap that exists because of the experience during COVID-19. Before they were more like: ‘Deal with your family.’ Now they have all these employees with fewer options. I know my employer is making special arrangements with employees to retain staff. I think more employers are accommodating if they are able to.” – Parent

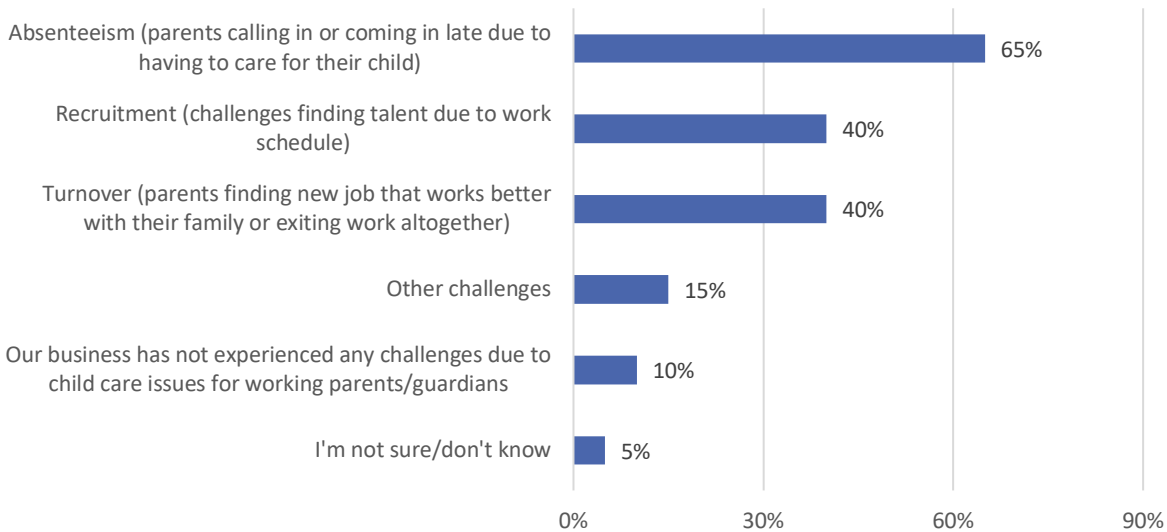
KEY FINDING: Businesses are negatively impacted by employees' child care challenges. Employers note absenteeism due to child care issues, challenges recruiting employees, and turnover resulting from difficulty in balancing work and child care responsibilities.

Similar to parent respondent feedback, two-thirds of employer survey respondents identified absenteeism as an employee or business impact of child care challenges. Forty percent also identified recruitment challenges and turnover as employer or business impacts of child care issues. Because of the impact on business and hiring, stakeholders noted the need to think about child care challenges more broadly from an economic development perspective.

“As an employer, it's hard to keep good people if employees can't take care of their families. We've had some wonderful people with families we tried to recruit, and they were not comfortable coming unless they knew more about child care options. We need to think about this as an infrastructure piece – as economic development.” – Employer

ABSENTEEISM, RECRUITMENT, AND TURNOVER WERE KEY BUSINESS IMPACTS OF CHILD CARE CHALLENGES

Figure 38. Employer perspective on employee and business impact of child care challenges (N=20)



Source: Kittitas Child Care Needs Assessment Survey

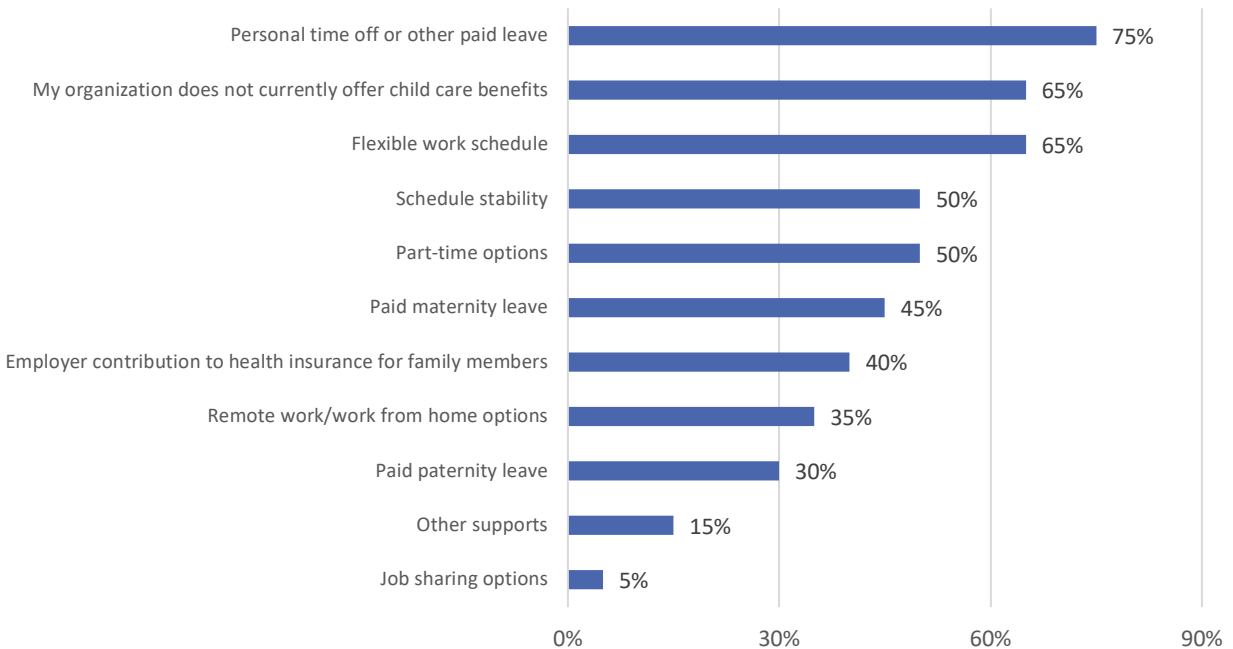
CHILD CARE AND FAMILY SUPPORT BENEFITS OFFERED AND USED

KEY FINDING: Employer family support benefits are limited, with personal time off, flexible work schedules, schedule stability, and part-time options the most offered benefits. Employers cite expense as the primary barrier to offering more robust child care benefits.

Among family support benefits broadly, employer survey respondents were most likely to identify offering personal time off or other paid leave (75%), flexible work schedules (65%), and schedule stability (50%), and part-time options (50%). Sixty-five percent of employee respondents did not offer any child care benefits, while 25 percent offered Dependent Care Flexible Spending Accounts and 10 percent offered other benefits.

MOST EMPLOYER RESPONDENTS OFFERED PERSONAL PAID TIME OFF AND FLEXIBLE WORK SCHEDULES

Figure 39. Percentage of employer respondents who offered family support benefits



Source: Kittitas Child Care Needs Assessment Survey

Three-quarters of employer survey respondents (75%) identified the expense of child care benefits as a barrier to implementation.

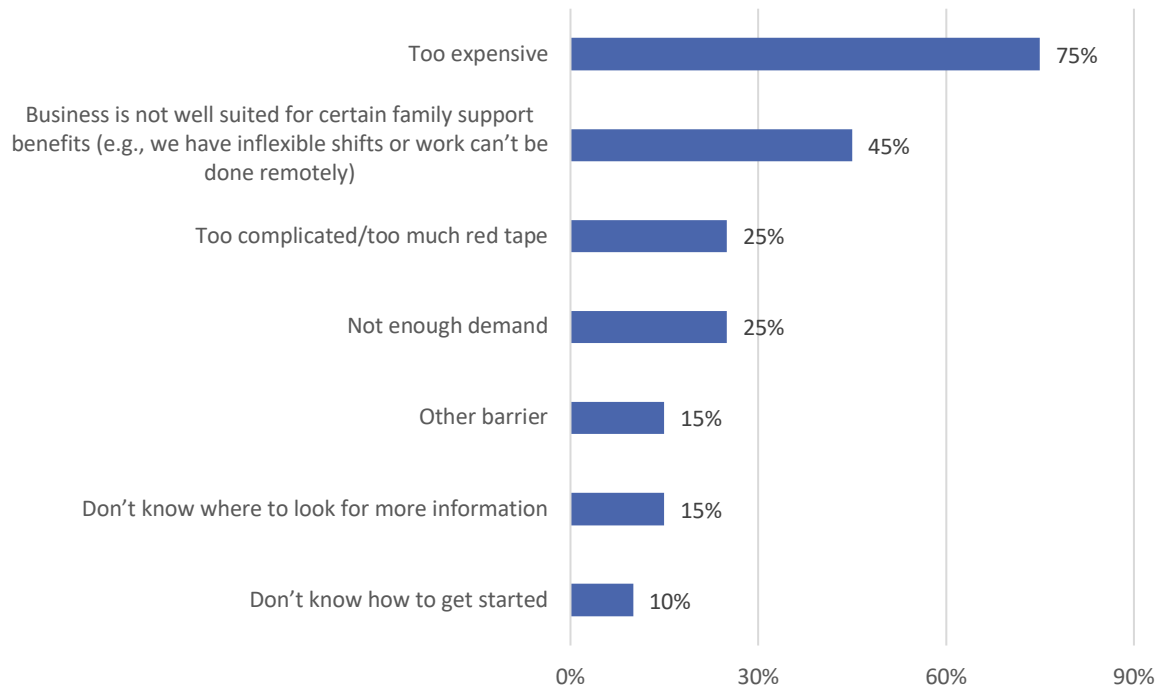
“We are a small non-profit. I’m not sure if we would ever have the resources for this.” – Employer

Employer interview respondents expressed interest in offering child care onsite, but noted challenges related to insurance, liability, complexity of regulations, and lack of familiarity with how to pursue the option. However, multiple employers indicated what a benefit offering onsite or subsidized child care could provide to recruitment and retention efforts, and several identified onsite child care as their aspirational “magic wand” solution. Several stakeholders suggested researching additional information about employer sponsored child care options, including on-site, subsidized, and cooperative models.

“We don’t have onsite child care. It’s been brought up, and I love the idea, but there are a lot of regulations and liability concerns to take on in caring for kids. But it would be an amazing recruitment tool. It would be great to partner with local daycare centers to get a discount. Maybe hold 5 or 10 seats for discounted rates and we can help subsidize – a partnership rather than ownership. We’ve talked about that internally.” – Employer

MOST EMPLOYERS CITED EXPENSE AS A BARRIER TO PROVIDING CHILD CARE BENEFITS

Figure 40. Percentage of employers by identified barrier to providing child care benefits (N=20)

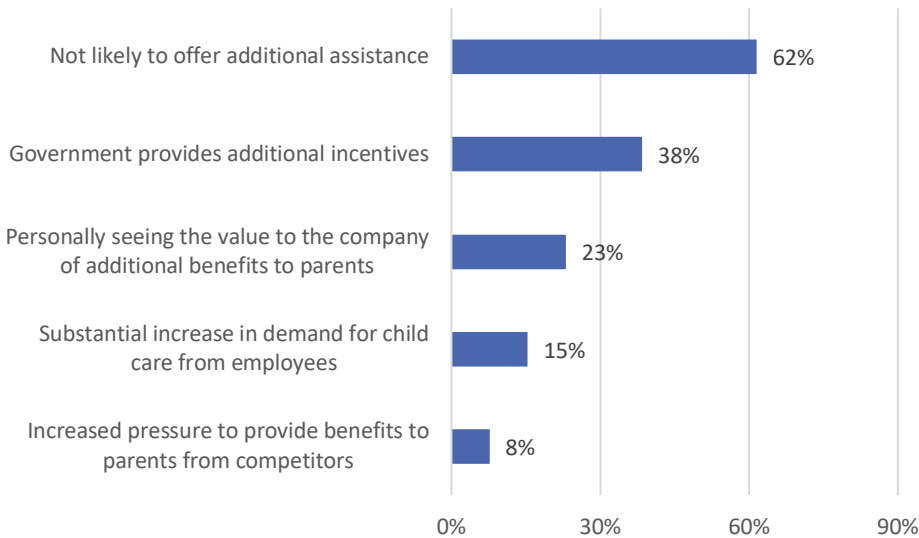


Source: Kittitas Child Care Needs Assessment Survey

The majority of employer respondents (62%) were unlikely to offer additional child care assistance, while just over a third would offer more support if the government provided additional incentives. Employer survey responses regarding barriers and supports for providing child care assistance suggests the opportunity to develop targeted resources to help employers understand their options and facilitate greater adoption of child care assistance policies.

MOST EMPLOYER RESPONDENTS ARE NOT LIKELY TO OFFER ADDITIONAL CHILD CARE ASSISTANCE

Figure 41. Percentage of employers by conditions that would increase child care assistance provision (N=20)



Source: Kittitas Child Care Needs Assessment Survey

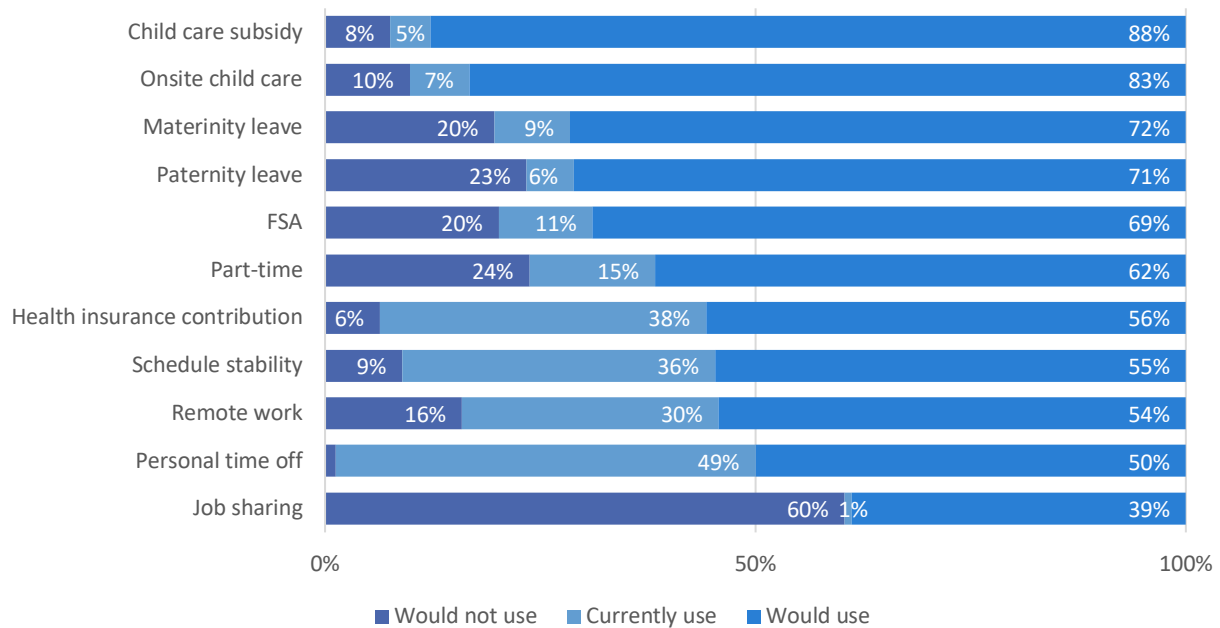
RECOMMENDATION: Engage employer leadership in investigating creative child care assistance options. Stakeholders agree on the potential employee recruitment and retention benefits that more stable child care options would provide. Child care challenges affect caregiver and employer bottom lines alike. Increased employer involvement in exploring creative options to solve the child care crisis, including employer sponsored child care slots, cooperative child care options, and shared onsite facilities, could mutually benefit businesses and families. In particular, stakeholders encouraged exploration of cooperative or collective child care options that distribute cost and liability across employers and providers.

KEY FINDING: Parent feedback suggests widespread demand for more robust child care and family support offerings. Parents are eager to use a wide range of family support benefits including and beyond the more commonly offered policies such as personal time off, health insurance contribution, and schedule stability.

Parent survey respondents were most likely to be currently using select family support benefits, including personal time off (49% of respondents), health insurance contributions (38%), schedule stability (36%), and remote work (30%). If available, the vast majority of respondents would use all family support benefit options presented in the survey, with the exception of job sharing.

THE MAJORITY OF PARENT SURVEY RESPONDENTS USE OR WOULD USE ALL FAMILY SUPPORT BENEFITS, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF JOB SHARING

Figure 42. Parent survey respondents by use of family support benefits (N=232 to 244)



Source: Kittitas Child Care Needs Assessment Survey

RECOMMENDATION: Identify a point person to help employers research and navigate their options in providing child care and family benefits. Employer survey and interview respondents cited expense, administrative red tape, and not knowing where to look for more information as barriers to providing more robust child care assistance packages. Identifying a community point person who can help employers understand their options, the administrative steps and expense needed to implement policies, and ways to facilitate or reduce barriers to implementation could increase uptake of family forward policies that benefit both employers and parent workers.

RECOMMENDATION: Adopt and modify a business toolkit to support employer understanding of family friendly policy options. The toolkit can include a range of options including offering parental leave, child care savings accounts, and providing on-site child care to employees. Toolkits from other communities can be modified for Kittitas County.³¹

³¹ Montana Family Forward Draft Employer Toolkit

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c90fe4716b640613581ddff/t/5ceed961e2c48379c66cc372/1559157090011/Family+Forward+Montana+Business+Practices_REVIEW+VERSION+.pdf

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY

The tables below summarize Kittitas County child care needs assessment finding and recommendations.

ACCESS

Capacity	
Key Findings	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The unduplicated child care capacity in Kittitas County across age ranges is 994, however the accepted capacity for all ages is lower: 732 slots. • Fully 88 percent of child care capacity is located in Ellensburg, while the Ellensburg metro area is home to just 46 percent of children ages 0-14 in the county. • Stakeholders report a decline in family home child care, mirroring national trends. • Part-time, afterschool, and full-time care are most in demand, yet part-time and afterschool care are less commonly offered compared to full-time care. • Families need more part-time options, particularly for those seeking behavioral health or substance use disorder treatment. • Child care capacity does not meet demand. • Infant care is among the least available types of care. • School-age children are underserved. • The county does not have sufficient early intervention or school-age child care for children with special needs. • Latinx families would benefit from more culturally and linguistically responsive outreach and programming. • Demand for child care for children in foster families varies, but stakeholders note the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pursue options to expand care in rural areas of the county. Consider using ARPA dollars as seed funding. • Work to increase the number of family home child care providers in Kittitas County through recruitment and enhanced, targeted support. • Expand high-quality child care capacity available during non-traditional work hours. • Analyze opportunities for increased financial support of child care programs, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Startup funding/grants ○ Expansion funding/grants ○ Emergency grants/funding ○ Non-traditional hour care increased reimbursement ○ Part C collaboration stipend ○ Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership stipend • Support efforts to increase licensed infant/toddler care options, as well as advocate to increase Working Connections reimbursement rates to incentivize more providers to accept subsidies for infant/toddlers. • Increase parent and provider awareness and understanding of outdoor education opportunities.

<p>need for more child care options for children in foster care.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most current providers are not interested in expanding capacity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support efforts to increase out-of-school time care, including outdoor school options, which would serve the school-age population particularly well. • Continue to assess options to support access to high quality early intervention and child care for children with special needs. • Investigate creative options for bilingual child care outreach and increase cultural diversity training. • Additional recommendations to increase capacity are included in the quality and workforce attachment sections below.
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Cost and Affordability

Key Findings	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care costs have increased faster than inflation for most types of care and age ranges. Costs are highest for center-based infant and toddler care. • Median income for families grew slower than average child care costs. • Parents report that “cost/affordability” is the primary challenge they experience with child care. • Overall, there is insufficient access to all types of subsidized care. • There are approximately 400 Kittitas County children under age 6 who may be eligible for one of the 108 Early Head Start or Head Start slots, and approximately 104 children ages 3 and 4 who may be eligible for one of 18 ECEAP slots. • The percentage of providers accepting Working Connections subsidies has decreased, with providers citing burdensome administrative requirements and low reimbursement rates. • Insufficient subsidy reimbursement rates for infant and toddler care is a barrier to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze opportunities for increased financial support of families, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Additional co-pay assistance for families with low and middle incomes ○ Essential worker funding/grants through ARPA • Work with ESD 105 to develop strategies to maximize the use of EHS/HS slots.

<p>providers’ accepting subsidies for infants and toddlers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is an estimated 1 child care slot accepting Working Connections for approximately 4 eligible children in Kittitas County. 	
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Other Access Barriers

Key Findings	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families primarily use social media and word of mouth to find child care. • Transportation causes additional access barriers for some families. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase marketing for Catholic Charities/Child Care Aware resource hotline and other child care resources so families know what may be available to them in a more formal way. • Consider options like mobile resource centers, collaborating with community health workers, and family engagement specialists to effectively provide child care information. • Explore opportunities to expand transportation options to support child care access and attendance.

Outdoor Education

Key Findings	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providers and Spanish-speaking parents expressed doubts about the feasibility or desirability of full-time outdoor school, while English-speaking parents were interested in full-time outdoor school, finding that the part-time options currently available do not accommodate working parents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pursue outdoor education primarily as a strategy to meet demand for part-time, drop-in, and afterschool care. • Work with selected interested providers and parents to investigate full-time options.

QUALITY

Parent Perspective

Key Findings	Recommendations

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families with children in care are satisfied with the care quality. 	
Child Care Licensing	
Key Findings	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of universal child care licensing requirements impacts the number of children in unregulated, potentially low-quality care, creates an uneven playing field for providers, and reduces access for families eligible for subsidies. Licensing regulations are harder for family home providers to implement. Child care licensing implementation is inconsistent. Fire, sanitation, and zoning requirements can further complicate child care licensing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide pre-licensing and licensing technical support to child care providers. Provide financial support for potential and expanding providers to meet licensing requirements. Evaluate fire, sanitation, and zoning requirements. Advocate for elimination of licensing exemptions.
Early Achievers/QRIS	
Key Findings	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Linkage of subsidies with Early Achievers has decreased provider interest in participating in both programs, particularly for family home ECE providers. Fewer Kittitas County child care providers are participating in Early Achievers. Early Achievers education and training requirements may dissuade program participation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support consistent, clear messaging about Early Achievers with providers. Collaborate with other early education stakeholders to modify regulations, policies, and processes to better support family home provider participation in Early Achievers.
Readiness for Kindergarten	
Key Findings	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More children are assessed as entering kindergarten ready to learn. The Kittitas Early Learning Coalition is an important asset for early childhood system collaboration, which supports more effective kindergarten transition. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve equitable access to high quality early learning opportunities. Reinvigorate the Early Learning Coalition and relationship building efforts to increase coordination between ECE and school-age educators to improve the transition to

	kindergarten and preschool for children, families, and educators.
Other Structural Supports to Promote Provider Quality	
Key Findings	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child care provider compensation impacts workforce stability and professionalization. • Early Learning Coalition is an important asset for early childhood system collaboration. • Staffed family child care networks are considered one of the most effective strategies to support in-home care providers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase public and family awareness on the benefits of high-quality care. • Continue to participate in efforts align the provider pay scale across the birth to elementary continuum. • Analyze approaches options for apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs and how to transition students in training into paid careers. • Consider implementing a family child care network to support family home provider capacity and quality. • Explore the micro-center network hub model as an option to increase capacity with multiple, one-classroom ECE ‘centers’ located in other facilities such as public schools, hospitals, office buildings, or community centers, minimizing facility costs. Administrative services and provider supports are centralized.

WORKFORCE ATTACHMENT

Child Care Impact on Workforce Attachment	
Key Findings	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data show that the unemployment rate is returning to pre-pandemic levels, but there are still many who remain out of the labor force. • Child care availability impacts caregivers’ workforce attachment, including their ability to seek work, increase hours, and pursue promotions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage employer leadership in investigating creative child care assistance options. • Identify a point person to help employers research and navigate their options in providing child care and family benefits.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The pandemic exacerbated barriers to workforce attachment that result from child care challenges but may have increased employer awareness and action. • Flexible work options arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, including remote work, may persist indefinitely post-pandemic, but are likely to be available ongoing to more limited employment positions. • Businesses are negatively impacted by child care challenges. Stakeholders note absenteeism due to child care issues, challenges recruiting employees, and turnover resulting from difficulty in balancing work and child care responsibilities. • Employer family support benefits are limited, with personal time of, flexible work schedules, schedule stability and part-time options the most offered benefits. Employers cite expense as the primary barrier to offering more robust child care benefits. • Parent feedback suggests widespread demand for more robust child care and family support offerings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt and modify a business toolkit to support employer understanding of family friendly policy options.
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