

INLAND NORTHWEST REGION STATE OF THE CHILDREN EARLY LEARNING & CARE



Ferry, Stevens, Pend Oreille,
Lincoln, Spokane, Adams, and
Whitman Counties

47,413

CHILDREN UNDER SIX IN THE REGION



13,735 (29%) OF CHILDREN UNDER SIX
IN LOW-INCOME* HOUSEHOLDS

Spanish, Russian

MOST COMMON LANGUAGES SPOKEN AT
HOME OTHER THAN ENGLISH

30%

(14,363)
CHILDREN OF COLOR

CHILD CARE ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY AFFECTS US ALL

Lack of access to **child care costs employers an estimated \$178.3M** due to employee absenteeism, turnover, and lost productivity. **40% of children do not have access to a licensed child care.** For those that do, the average cost of child care for two children is \$20,856, **25% of the average family's income.**

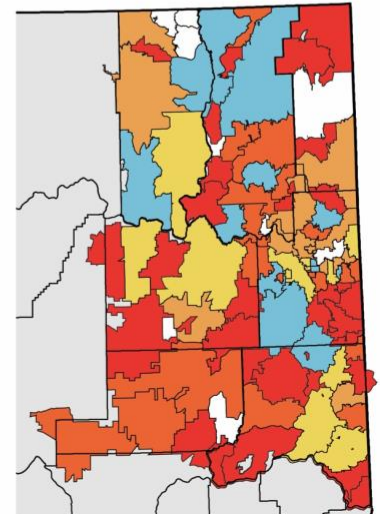
ECEAP AND HEAD START

Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) and Head Start preschool programs specialize in inclusive and high-quality care for low-income families and children with disabilities. Right now, these critical programs only serve half of the 6,208 children in our region who need them.

50%

(3,096)
OF CHILDREN WHO NEED
AN ECEAP/HS SLOT HAVE A
SPACE AVAILABLE TO THEM

PERCENT OF CHILD CARE DEMAND MET**



- More than 75% need met
- Between 50 - 74% need met
- Between 25 - 49% need met
- Less than 25% need met
- No Child Care
- Not Enough Data

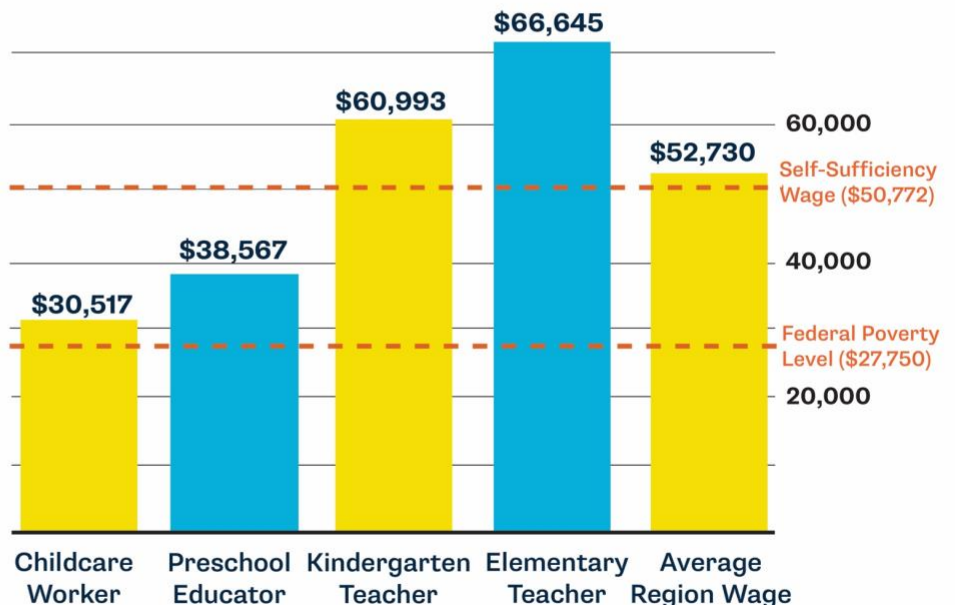
EARLY LEARNING WORKFORCE

Our early learning and care system currently depends on **1,556 early learning and child care professionals** in the Inland Northwest region, of whom **more than half are people of color** and more than 80% are female. While providing an essential service, most child care providers make near poverty wages and **50% with one dependent would qualify for some form of government assistance.**

*We define low-income as 200 percent of the federal poverty line, which is \$52,400 for a family of four.

**Visual of 2020 data. Capacity includes Child Care Centers and Family Homes

CHILD CARE VS. K-12 WAGES



CHALLENGES TO PROVIDING CARE AND EDUCATION

“Providing education and child care in my rural county is quite difficult. I currently have a 3-year-old and a 6-year-old, and I teach part time at our parent co-op. We have many parents interested in joining, but as soon as they realize that we are not a full time child care facility they are unable to participate. We also see an influx of the grandparent generation bringing children to our co-op. Many parents in our rural area rely on their own parents as caregivers. While our co-op does offer limited drop off care, most parents need more than a few hours. It’s unfortunate because becoming a full time child care center is costly and difficult, and our co-op environment provides a rich learning, socialization, and parent support system.” – Jana Mueller, parent (pictured right)



CHALLENGES TO ACCESSING CARE AND EDUCATION

Amber Swain has five children (pictured below), three of whom are adopted. She has experienced many challenges when it comes to finding care for her children. When her three oldest boys were younger and in her care as children in foster care, licensed care wasn’t an option, and Amber and her husband had to rely solely on babysitters. Now her boys are older and in school, but she continues to have challenges finding care for her younger children. There are very few options for full-time care in the rural county where Amber lives, and the ones that do exist are full. She has been on the waitlist for over a year for a center in her town. Until a spot opens up, Amber’s husband is staying home with their children. Her family could really use an additional income, but they don’t have another option. Previously, Amber’s daughter received unacceptable and harmful care at a licensed center, so she feels strongly about finding the right location for her kids, even if that means sacrificing in other areas of her life.

IMPACT OF THE FAIR START FOR KIDS ACT

Passed in 2021, the Fair Start for Kids Act made historic investments that were intended to accomplish the following:

- Make child care more affordable for low-income families
- Expand early intervention and behavioral health services for young children and caregivers.

While these investments are a good start, the majority of child care providers continue to make near poverty wages, child care deserts persist, and children with disabilities are often unable to access inclusive care. Continued and increased support for our early childhood systems is necessary to create true access and equity for all Washington’s children and caregivers.



WHAT YOU CAN DO TO GET INVOLVED

For Washington state, time is of the essence. Children, families, and educators need and deserve a fully funded system that supports them. Please join us in advocating with them for:

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

To get involved with the Inland Northwest Early Learning Alliance, the early childhood coalition encompassing Ferry, Stevens, Pend Oreille, Lincoln, Spokane, Adams, and Whitman Counties, please email [Katie Maisch at katiem@inwela.org](mailto:katiem@inwela.org).

