

Early Care and Education Access and Living Wage Proviso: Engagement Feedback Summary

Background

This document is a summary of identified themes from engagement conducted by the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) in 2024. In addition to the listening sessions and surveys conducted by Washington Communities for Children (WCFC), DCYF solicited feedback from the following:

- Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC)
- Washington Childcare Center Association (WCCA)
- Licensed providers
- Provider Supports Subcommittee (PS)
- KinderCare
- DCYF staff
- Indian Policy of Early Learning (IPEL) Committee
- School's Out Washington (SOWA)
- Families through WCFC outreach

DCYF will submit the Early Care and Education Access and Living Wage Proviso Implementation Plan to the Legislature in June 2025. The plan will outline DCYF's vision for increasing access to affordable, high-quality early care and education that caps families' out-of-pocket pay at no more than 7% of their family income (an amount considered sustainable for families) and uplifts the early care and education workforce with living wages and benefits.

Below is a summary of the feedback received to date:

Access and Affordability for Families

- Expand eligibility for Working Connections Child Care (WCCC).
- Increase incentives and subsidy rates for providers that offer non-standard hour care.
 - Expanded hours are needed to meet the family's care needs.
 - More programs need to offer extended hours or 24-hour care.
- Increase resources and funding for infant and toddler care that support the added costs for caring for the youngest children.
- Increase options for school-age care and summer care.
- Expand outreach and community engagement.
 - Use plain talk in all documentation (e.g., applications, brochures, etc.)
 - Make resources available in the home language of families.
- Build relationships with trusted community members to help share information about WCCC.



Facilities

- Develop the skills and meet the needs for providers to be successful on their own as they learn what is needed to manage and/or maintain their own facility/program space.
 - Create a toolkit of resources to support facility expansion.
- Create a role that would assist facilities with maintenance or expansion.
- Develop resources and educational opportunities to support providers in understanding facility funding and grants.
- Identify which community partners would be best points of contact for expansion/converting spaces.
 - Establish partnerships with experts to be referred to for program expansion and converting existing spaces.
- Identify alternative locations that already exist and need to be converted to support early learning.
 - Look at local laws and potential buildings.
 - Identify DCYF's oversight when directing someone to the appropriate experts.

Professional Development and Compensation

- Increase subsidy rates to uplift the early care and education workforce in earning a living wage and benefits.
- Increase access to trainings and education for the early care and education workforce to meet the needs of children in their care:
 - More children are entering care that need additional support for complex needs.
 - Access and trainings need to support inclusion.
 - Provide supports and benefits that promote career growth.
- Increase Early Achievers coaching and technical assistance (TA) to support providers.
 - Specialized coaching for providers who are opening businesses.
 - Connecting new providers to coaches and TA opportunities who are entering the early care and education workforce.
 - Licensor support or TA to navigate multiple systems for providers who are entering the early care and education workforce.
- Expand business supports/shared services hub to include family advocates and navigators to help families find child care and support.

Integrated Classrooms and Systems

- Create a system where families can see all the benefits they are eligible for (not just WCCC).
 - Collaborate with other organizations and agencies to streamline systems.
- Identify ways to braid funding to support children and benefit the whole program.
- Increase access to comprehensive screening tools to examine the family's situation and child needs.

This feedback will inform the recommendations by DCYF, Child Care Aware of WA, and Service Employees International Union (SEIU) 925 for the Early Care and Education Access and Living Wage Proviso Implementation Plan.