



## **Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC)** **FSKA Report Development Session**

November 19, 2024

### **Top 10 Themes from the 2024 Community Child Care Forums**

Below are the ten most frequently recurring themes we heard across nearly every region. While some of these topics may fall outside the scope of the Fair Start for Kids Act (FSKA) report, we want to share what providers have been telling us.

1. **Licensing and WAC Interpretation:**
  - a. All regions raised concerns about inconsistent interpretation and unclear guidance on Washington Administrative Codes (WACs), which impact providers' understanding of compliance requirements.
2. **Subsidy Rates and Payment Processes:**
  - a. Almost all regions expressed concerns about low subsidy rates and the equity between subsidized and private-pay children. They also voiced frustrations with delays in subsidy processing, eligibility criteria, and unclear procedures related to attendance and claiming days for subsidies.
3. **Staff Qualifications and Training:**
  - a. Many regions expressed the need for clearer information on staff qualifications, easier access to training options, and more flexibility in meeting education requirements. The challenge of finding qualified staff, particularly considering mandatory training like the 30-hour CCB, and issues with MERIT were noted as significant obstacles.
4. **Communication/Relationship Improvement with DCYF:**
  - a. Communication, particularly with DCYF and licensors, was a recurring topic brought up. Providers highlighted the need for clearer, more timely communication, especially regarding licensing visits, subsidy issues/questions, and foster care coordination.
5. **Grants and Funding:**
  - a. Many providers are interested in learning about available grant options and understanding the application process. There is also interest in resources to help navigate the application process smoothly and equitably. Providers also expressed interest in expanding the availability of grants for facilities, complex needs and qualifications/Early Achievers/scholarship opportunities.
6. **Complex/Special Needs Support:**
  - a. Providers across regions expressed challenges in meeting the demands of children with complex needs. Many voiced a need for additional support through grants and training to enhance their ability to provide the necessary care and resources for these children.
7. **MERIT Application Enhancements:**
  - a. Providers requested better functionality in MERIT, including automated notifications for background checks, better tracking of employee records, and an easier way to check



scholarship waitlists. Improving usability in MERIT would ease administrative burdens on providers.

**8. Background Checks and Regional Access:**

- a. Providers reported logistical issues with accessing background check services, especially in remote areas. They suggested improvements for regional access to ensure fair and timely processing.

**9. Language Access and Culturally Competent Communication:**

- a. Providers emphasized the importance of having bilingual and culturally sensitive communications, particularly for Spanish-speaking communities.

**10. Transitional Kindergarten (TK) Impacts:**

- a. TK expansion has impacted childcare providers by shifting enrollment patterns and contributing to rate concerns. Providers suggested clearer TK standards and additional support for alignment with Early Achievers standards to support preschool-aged children better.