

EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION FACILITIES IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Washington State Department of CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

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Washington State Department of CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

CONTENTS

EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION FACILITIES IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 1
Executive Summary 4
Acknowledgements 5
Introduction 12
Vision and Purpose 12
Building on Prior Efforts 12
Background: The State of ECE Facilities in Washington 14
Facilities Development Supports Available to Providers 14
Common Challenges to Developing Facilities 15
Total Statewide Costs to Meet Facilities Needs 19
Methodology 20
Recommendations 21
Structure of the Recommendations 21
Recommendations 24
Summary of Strategy Roles and Resources and Proposed Phasing 46
Progress Measurement 52
Conclusion and Next Steps 52
Appendices 54
Appendix A. Engagement Summary 54
Appendix B. Land Use Code Review and Surveys Summary 54
Appendix C. Early Learning Facilities Catalog 54
Appendix D. DCYF Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan 54
Appendix E. ECE Facilities Needs and Costs 54

Appendix F. DCYF Capital Readiness Plan..... 54

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Executive Summary

The Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) envisions a future in which all families in Washington have access to affordable, high-quality early care and education (ECE) for their children from birth through age 12. To achieve this vision, there must be enough safe, high-quality facility spaces where providers can care for children in every community.

Recent efforts from the Legislature, state agencies, philanthropy, advocacy organizations, and others have meaningfully supported availability of ECE facilities in Washington (see Building on Prior Efforts and Facilities Development Supports Available to Providers for more detail). Nonetheless, there is still a substantial shortage of ECE space and there are substantial challenges with developing facilities.

- **The shortage of ECE facilities.** DCYF's *Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan* outlines statewide goals for expanded ECE (see Appendix D. DCYF Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan). To meet these goals, this study estimates that the state may need an additional 1,400 to 6,000 new or expanded facilities to serve 860,000 to 1.4 million children. Phased facility expansion is estimated to cost between $3.3 billion to $12.6 billion in total investments over time. (See Total Statewide Costs to Meet Facilities Needs for more detail.)
- **Challenges with developing facilities:** Providers looking to develop facilities face a range of challenges, including access to financing; administrative complexity; limited ECE facilities development expertise; siting complexities; and local code and permitting. Providers in rural areas face additional barriers that compound these challenges. (See Common Challenges to Developing Facilities for more detail.)

This *ECE Facilities Implementation Plan* offers a series of recommendations to address these challenges and the shortage of ECE facilities. See the textbox on the next page for a summary of the recommendations.

Implementation of these recommendations will require substantial cross-sector involvement and large-scale public and private investment.

- **Roles:** A wide range of agencies, businesses, groups, and individuals engage in the ECE facilities development process, including state agencies, local jurisdictions, providers, developers, philanthropy, advocates, and other entities. See Roles for more detail.

- **Resources:** Recommendations will require resources to implement, which may include a combination of changes to laws or rules, financial resources, or increased staffing. See Resources for more detail.

Throughout the implementation of these recommendations, DCYF will evaluate and report on progress, as described in Progress Measurement. Policymakers will need to decide:

- Which strategies to fund in the next biennium and future biennia.
- Whether to expand capital funding for facilities.
- Whether to change laws to reduce barriers.

Summary of Recommendations in this ECE Facilities Implementation Plan

Goal 1: Public, private, and nonprofit sectors across the state coordinate and streamline ECE facilities development.

Objective 1.1: Increase coordination among State agencies in pursuit of a cohesive, data-informed approach to supporting ECE facilities development.

Objective 1.2: Engage the private sector as a core partner in ECE facilities development.

Objective 1.3: Streamline facilities requirements at the state and local levels while maintaining health and safety requirements.

Goal 2: There are adequate financial resources and technical support for ECE facilities development.

Objective 2.1: Supply anyone looking to develop or support ECE facilities with appropriate and timely information and technical assistance.

Objective 2.2: Provide multiple funding sources, including public, private, and public/private partnerships, to support provider capital funding needs.

Goal 3: ECE facilities development is supported by cost-effective solutions.

Objective 3.1: Use existing, available public property for ECE facilities.

Objective 3.2: Streamline licensing options to minimize costs and increase flexibility.

Objective 3.3: Explore ways to better meet ECE facilities needs in small-town and rural areas.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank everyone who contributed their knowledge and expertise to develop this *Early Care and Education (ECE) Facilities Implementation Plan*, including:

- **Members of the ECE Facilities Exploration Workgroup.** This *ECE Facilities Implementation Plan* was developed in partnership with leaders and providers across the state who participated in an ad hoc workgroup. See Exhibit 1 for workgroup membership.
- **Participants in interviews, focus groups, and surveys.** The process to develop this *ECE Facilities Implementation Plan* entailed substantial data collection through interviews, focus groups, and surveys. Participants included providers, architecture and development professionals, Washington state agencies, local jurisdictions, school districts, advocacy organizations, funders, and one Tribal Nation representative. See Appendix A. Engagement Summary and Appendix B. Land Use Code Review and Surveys Summary for more detailed lists of participants. See the textbox below for a summary of Tribal Nation outreach.
- **DCYF staff and advisory committees**. The Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC), the Provider Supports subcommittee of ELAC, and the Indian Policy Early Learning (IPEL) Committee provided feedback throughout the development of this *ECE Facilities Implementation Plan*. Staff from across DCYF, including an internal steering committee, also contributed.
- **Consultant support.** BERK Consulting, Barbara Rosen Consulting, and SME Consulting provided consultant support.

Exhibit 1. ECE Facilities Exploration Workgroup

Organization	Individual Member(s)
Association of Washington Cities	Carl Schroeder
Child Care Aware of Washington	Genevieve Stokes
City of Seattle	Ken Astrein
Design for Early Learning	Diane Kroll
Enterprise Community Partners	Juanita Salinas-Aguila, Cassandra Ellis
Environmental Works	Chrissie Seilie
Imagine Institute	Pauli Owen
King County	Justine Viloria
Rural Resources Community Action	Katie Crise
School's Out Washington	Radu Smintina
Service Employees International Union 925	Lupita Suarez
StartEarly Washington	Casey Osborn
WA Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF)	Debbie Groff, Judy Jaramillo, Nicole Rose, Diana Stokes, Ana Cruz
WA DCYF Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC)	Lois Martin
WA Department of Commerce	Kristin Ramos, Mary Reinbold
WA Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)	Latisha Conley, Morgan Powell
Whatcom County	Sarah Simpson

Source: BERK, 2026.

Tribal Nations

DCYF adheres to DCYF Policy 10.03 and RCW 43.376, which guide government-to-government relationships with Tribal Nations and support consultation, collaboration, and coordination with Tribal governments in the development of policies, agreements, and program implementation that may directly affect Tribal Nations. This approach is also consistent with the Washington State 1989 Centennial Accord and Executive Order 25-10.

DCYF sought Tribal input to this Implementation Plan through:

- Dear Tribal Leader and Director letters.
- Updates to the IPEL Committee, which assesses the collective ECE needs of Tribal governments and Indian organizations.
- Two Tribal engagement sessions.
- Surveys that invited participation from Tribal ECE professionals and public works professionals.

While development of this Implementation Plan included the above engagement efforts, it is important to acknowledge that facilities development on Tribal lands is not appropriately addressed through state-driven study, planning, or standardization efforts. Tribal participation in this project was limited, and as a result, this report should not be interpreted as reflecting broad Tribal consensus regarding ECE facilities priorities, barriers, or preferred state approaches.

Many state and local regulatory, permitting, financing, and planning structures referenced throughout this report may not apply on Tribal lands or within Tribal governmental systems. State-led strategies and standards grant models are not designed to reflect Tribal land status, infrastructure realities, governance structures, or decision-making processes, and therefore may create barriers rather than access for Tribal Nations.

Tribal Nations are best positioned to determine their own facility needs, design priorities, development timelines, and culturally grounded approaches to ECE environments. These needs are often fundamentally different from off-reservation systems due to factors including land status, infrastructure limitations, geographic isolation, cultural priorities, and governance structures.

DCYF commits to continuing to engage Tribal Nations and create opportunities for meaningful government-to-government dialogue regarding future ECE facilities work. To effectively support Tribal ECE facilities development, funding approaches should prioritize direct, flexible, and noncompetitive mechanisms that allow Tribal Nations to design and implement solutions that reflect their unique community contexts. These approaches should support equitable access for all federally recognized Tribes in Washington state and should not require participation in state-defined systems or competitive grant processes.

Definitions

This *ECE Facilities Implementation Plan* uses the following terms. See the Workforce Growth, Quality, and Recognition Definition Guide for more definitions that are relevant to ECE.

- **Access and Living Wage (ALW) Plan.** A 2025 DCYF publication that outlines a comprehensive set of scalable policy recommendations to implement a universally accessible, publicly funded ECE system in 10 years.
- **Certified care.** Exempt from DCYF child care licensing. DCYF may certify an otherwise exempt child care program for subsidy payment if the program is licensed by an Indian tribe, band, nation, or other organized community of Indians, including an Alaska native village as defined in 43 U.S.C. § Sec 1602, recognized as eligible for services by the United States Secretary of the Interior; certified by the federal Department of Defense; or approved by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), and be located on the premises over which the tribe, federal Department of Defense, or OSPI has jurisdiction. Programs may request to become certified by DCYF. In such a case, DCYF shall apply licensing rules equally to licensed and certified child care programs.
- **Child Care Center.** A business that regularly provides early childhood education and early learning services for a group of children for periods of less than 24 hours.
- **Child Care Partnership Grants (CCPG).** Grants administered by the Department of Commerce to support local communities to expand access to affordable, high-quality ECE, especially for underserved and historically marginalized communities.
- **Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs).** Financial institutions such as banks, credit unions, or other lenders, that offer loans with more flexible or advantageous terms than traditional lenders.
- **Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF).** A cabinet-level agency focused on the well-being of children. DCYF is the lead agency for state-funded services that support children and families to build resilience and health, and to improve educational outcomes.
- **Department of Commerce (COM).** The lead state agency charged with enhancing and promoting sustainable community and economic vitality in Washington.
- **Early care and education (ECE).** A broad term used to describe the educational and developmental experiences and activities provided for children birth through 12 years of age.

- **Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP).** Washington state's prekindergarten program that prepares three-and four-year-old children from families furthest from opportunity for success in school and in life.
- **Early Learning Advisory Council** (ELAC). ELAC is an advisory group created by Washington state law (RCW 43.216.075) to give advice on early learning issues. ELAC helps build strong and high-quality early learning programs and services for young children and families across the state. ELAC works with DCYF to help create and carry out policies that support children be ready for school. Each year, ELAC gives recommendations to the Governor and Legislature about important early learning goals. The council also focuses on fairness, racial equity, inclusion, and making sure children with disabilities are supported. ELAC helps DCYF review early learning programs funded by the Fair Start for Kids Act. This includes efforts to increase access to quality child care and support to families and child care providers.
- **Early Learning Facilities (ELF) Program.** A grant program for ECEAP and Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) facilities that Commerce (COM) administers in partnership with DCYF, OSPI, Washington Community Reinvestment Association, Enterprise Community Partners, Craft3, and the Early Learning Facilities Advisory Group.
- **Provider Supports Subcommittee of ELAC.** Washington law (RCW 43.216.075) created the Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC) to give DCYF advice on early learning issues. ELAC can also form smaller groups, called subcommittees, to focus on specific topics. The Provider Supports Subcommittee started in January 2020. It brings early learning providers and DCYF together to talk about real issues providers face in their daily work. The group gives advice to DCYF on topics like licensing requirements, changes in laws and policies, subsidy rates, Early Achievers, and other processes that affect providers. The feedback from this group helps DCYF understand what is working well, what is difficult, and how to improve services and support over time.
- **Facilities development.** This report uses the term "facilities development" to broadly refer to any of the following: construction of a new ECE facility; renovation or expansion of an existing ECE facility; or retrofitting an existing non-ECE facility to serve as an ECE facility.
- **Fair Start for Kids Act.** Legislation passed in 2021 that will increase investments in early learning services and expand access to programs and services for families.
- **Indian Policy Early Learning (IPEL) Committee.** The Indian Policy Early Learning (IPEL) Committee was created in 2013 based on recommendations from Tribal leaders. Its goal

is to ensure that DCYF programs and policies support Tribal families from pregnancy and children up to 5 years of age; and children in child care setting up to 13 years of age. Each federally recognized Tribe in Washington state can choose who to send to represent their Tribal Nation.

- **Licensed care.** Refers to a child care license issued by the department legally authorizing an applicant to operate an early learning program.
- **License exempt care.** DCYF must not license an ECE program that is legally exempt from licensing per RCW 43.216.010 (2). If a child care program requests to become certified by the department, the department shall apply all licensing rules to the otherwise exempt program.
- **Licensed Family Home**. An ECE program licensed by DCYF where a family home licensee provides child care or education services for 12 or fewer children in the family living quarters where the licensee resides as provided in RCW 43.216.010 (1)(c).
- **Outdoor Nature-Based (ONB) program.** Licensed, nature-based child care for preschool and school-age children.
- **Unlicensed care.** Refers to ECE programs that do not hold a DCYF child care license.
- **Washington Early Learning Loan (WELL) Fund.** A loan program that the Washington Community Reinvestment Association, Enterprise Community Partners, and Craft 3 administer. The WELL fund offers funding from the Department of Commerce, Ballmer Group, the Seattle Foundation and private sources to finance ECE facilities across the state.
- **Working Connections Child Care (WCCC).** ECE subsidy benefits for families with low income that help pay for ECE while parents work or meet Work First participation requirements.

Introduction

Vision and Purpose

DCYF's vision for early care and education (ECE) is that all families in Washington have access to affordable, high-quality ECE for children from birth through age 12. This supports child development, school readiness, and family stability, regardless of identity or income.

- **Access:** Whether ECE is available where families live and work.
- **High-quality:** Safe, healthy, stimulating, and developmentally appropriate environments, supported through Early Achievers and other culturally and community-defined quality approaches.[1]
- **ECE:** Washington's mixed-delivery system includes licensed family homes, centers, school age, outdoor nature-based programs, ECEAP, Family Friend and Neighbor care (FFN), Head Start, certified and certified for payment only, exempt from licensing programs, and other settings for children from birth through age 12.

To achieve this, Washington must have enough safe, high-quality facility spaces where providers can care for children in every community. This *ECE Facilities Implementation Plan* outlines a comprehensive set of recommendations to support ECE facilities needs in Washington.

Key Terminology: "ECE Facility Development"

This report uses the term "facilities development" to broadly refer to any of the following: construction of a new ECE facility; renovation or expansion of an existing ECE facility; or renovating an existing non-ECE facility to serve as an ECE facility. Pre-design and pre-development activities for all three are also encompasses in this definition.

See Definitions for more terms used throughout this report.

Building on Prior Efforts

This *ECE Implementation Plan* builds on important prior statewide work to support DCYF's ECE vision, including:

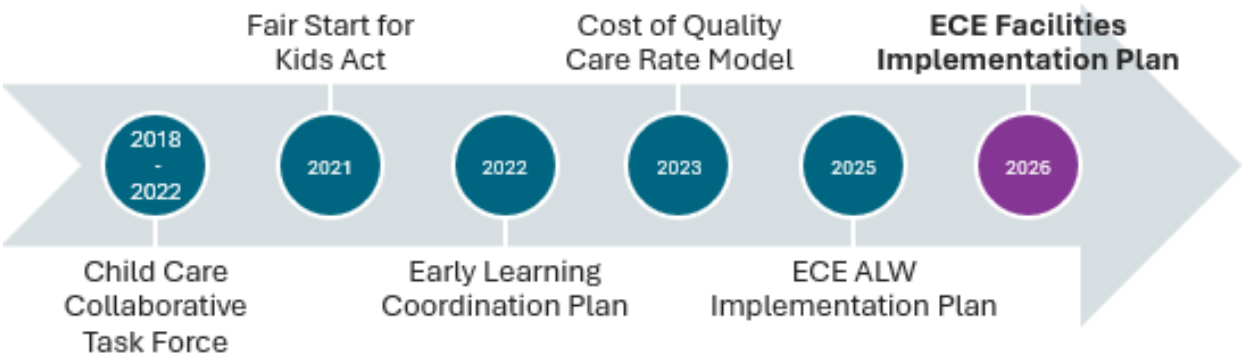
- **Major funding investments.** Since 2017, Washington state has invested over $330 million in ECE facilities through the ELF program, supporting increased access for families receiving WCCC and ECEAP services.

[1] Early Achievers is Washington's quality rating and improvement system.

- **Supportive legislation.** Other legislation has also addressed some barriers to ECE facilities development. See Appendix C. Early Learning Facilities Catalog for a detailed overview of much of this legislation.
- **Washington Administrative Code (WAC) revisions.** DCYF has updated WAC sections that relate to the licensing and operation of ECE facilities in response to legislation, state investments, COVID-19, and rules alignment.
- **Work of the Washington Child Care Collaborative Task Force (C3TF).** The C3TF has led several studies to assess and recommend improvements to key components of ECE in Washington, including a 2020 *Child Care Industry Assessment and Facilities Needs Assessment*.
- **Cross-sector involvement.** Other state agencies, non-governmental organizations, local jurisdictions, foundations, and others have independently and collaboratively invested in support for ECE facilities development.
- **DCYF's Access and Living Wage (ALW) Plan.** One core foundation for this ECE Facilities Implementation Plan is the ECE ALW Implementation Plan (see Appendix D. DCYF Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan). Released in 2025, that plan includes a comprehensive set of policy recommendations to implement a universally accessible, affordable, and high-quality ECE system in ten years. With a primary focus on access for families and a thriving ECE workforce, that report's fourth goal was adequate facilities for expansion of the ECE system, the focus of this *ECE Implementation Plan*.

See Exhibit 2 for key milestones this *ECE Facilities Implementation Plan* builds upon. A detailed overview of past investments and efforts is included in Appendix C. Early Learning Facilities Catalog.

Exhibit 2. Key Milestones the ECE Facilities Implementation Plan Builds Upon



Source: *DCYF, 2026; BERK, 2026.*

Background: The State of ECE Facilities in Washington

Expanding access to ECE opportunities for children and families is a critical need in Washington. While Washington has made important progress in recent years (see Building on Prior Efforts), a substantial gap nonetheless remains between the current state and what families and ECE providers need:

- Families face barriers to accessing high quality, affordable ECE opportunities.
- Providers face barriers to developing facilities.
- Beyond the impacts on individual families and the ECE sector, these challenges have substantial implications for Washington's overall economy, resulting in an estimated cost of $6.9 billion in 2023.[2]

The following subsections provide a snapshot of several key components of the current state of ECE facilities in Washington, including:

- Facilities Development Supports Available to Providers.
- Common Challenges to Developing Facilities, including Access to Financing; Administrative Complexity; Limited ECE Facilities Development Expertise; Siting; Local Code and Permitting; and Challenges Specific to Rural Areas.
- Total Statewide Costs to Meet Facilities Needs.

Facilities Development Supports Available to Providers

Many entities provide support to providers in developing ECE facilities. These include:

- **Technical assistance** throughout the facilities development process, including during the following phases:
    - **DCYF pre-licensing technical assistance** helps people who want to become licensed ECE providers. Personalized facilities-related pre-licensing support may cover topics like how to open an ECE program, site selection, or financing options.
    - **DCYF child care licensing technical assistance** supports providers after they have licensed their ECE facility.

  Other entities that provide technical assistance include:

[2] ECOnorthwest, Child Care Aware of Washington (2024). *Breaking Down: The Economic Cost of Child Care Disruptions in Washington,* page 10. Retrieved from: https://childcareforwa.org//wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Breaking-Down_The-Economic-Cost-of-Child-Care-Disruptions-in-Washington.pdf

  - State agencies like the Department of Commerce and DCYF
  - Federal agencies like the U.S. Small Business Administration or USDA rural development
  - Funders like Washington Community Reinvestment Association (WCRA) and Enterprise Community Partners
  - Non-governmental organizations like Child Care Aware of Washington and the Imagine Institute

  Additional technical assistance may also be available locally through other organizations and resources, such as local chambers of commerce, small business development centers, or workforce programs.

- **Funding opportunities** such as grants and loan programs. Examples include:
  - ELF Grant
  - WELL Fund
  - Federal grants, especially for ECE providers in rural and Tribal areas

Common Challenges to Developing Facilities

Providers and other ECE developers noted that the costs and complexity associated with development are a major challenge. The following common challenges amplify or contribute to the cost of developing facilities.

Access to Financing

In Washington's mixed-delivery system, small and independent ECE providers, who provide care to most young children in our state, face inequities in accessing capital for both facilities and operational needs. This especially impacts women of color and providers with low incomes. DCYF embraces equity as a foundation of and driving force behind our work by listening to and learning from families, providers, and communities.

Lack of access to financial capital impacts a provider's ability to develop a facility and to start, sustain, and expand their business. A provider attempting to finance an ECE facility project must navigate a complex patchwork of grants and loans with terms and rates that may be a barrier to access.

The largest providers typically can leverage their track record of successful operations to acquire new capital. However, these large, typically for-profit providers tend to operate in larger markets, limiting the flow of this capital to small and rural areas.[3]

Smaller-scale providers typically have thin financial margins, which limits their access to traditional loans.[4] This leads many providers to finance projects with credit card debt and personal loans, which is a risky form of financing.[5]

Administrative Complexity

When developing ECE facilities, providers must comply with regulations and infrastructure requirements that span multiple state and local government agencies, including:

- Business licensing
- Land use, zoning, and parking requirements
- Fire, life safety, energy, and health codes
- Building codes/change of use policies
- Licensing and quality standards

For providers with expertise in ECE provision rather than facilities development, this array of rules and regulations can be a significant challenge.[6] This challenge has already been the focus of substantial discussion in the ECE sector and has resulted in recommendations to simplify and consolidate requirements and formalize coordination across agencies. For example, the 2021 *Washington State Child Care Access Strategy* included the following goal: Streamlined state and local regulations, codes, permitting processes and fee structures facilitate ECE startup, operation, and expansion.[7]

Limited ECE Facilities Development Expertise

The many rules and regulations across multiple agencies, combined with the knowledge and skills needed to successfully manage a capital project, make it particularly difficult for many providers to effectively develop ECE facilities.[8] This is especially challenging for ECE providers

[3] Goldstein, D. (2022, December 12). Can Child Care Be a Big Business? Private Equity Thinks So. *The New York Times*, p. 1. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/16/us/child-care-centers-private-equity.html
[4] EPIC, (2025). *Strong Foundations: Strategies for Child Care Capital and Supply-Building Solutions.* Denver: Executives Partnering to Invest in Children.
[5] Appendix A. Engagement Summary.
[6] Appendix A. Engagement Summary.
[7] Child Care Collaborative Task Force (2021). *Washington State Child Care Access Strategy*, page 45. Retrieved from: https://deptofcommerce.app.box.com/s/tc6pqaz3cgufb8mq6ygdzjbjlghunn29
[8] See Appendix E. ECE Facilities Needs and Costs for a summary of the typical tasks required to successfully develop, a facility.

whose primary language is not English, those undertaking a project while operating an existing program, and those navigating the process for the first (and often only) time.[9]

Providers with access to professionals skilled in construction, architecture, and/or project management noted that these resources make a significant difference in limiting delays and cost overruns.[10]

Beyond providers' often-limited knowledge of ECE facilities development processes, many local jurisdictions, especially smaller jurisdictions also lack experience and expertise with ECE development. These knowledge gaps have led to failed rezoning efforts, limited understanding of ECE facility needs, and limited ability to manage neighborhood opposition when it arises.[11] DCYF has limited ability to provide providers and local jurisdictions with expertise in this regard due to the wide variation in city and county code across the state.

Siting

Suitable and affordable land and buildings to accommodate ECE, whether for traditional or outdoor nature-based (ONB) programs is limited and often expensive. Securing an existing building to lease or purchase can be challenging as it must be appropriately zoned for the intended development and able to meet licensing requirements, including access to outdoor play space. Developing a new facility is complex and costly, particularly in urban areas.

An additional challenge to siting an ECE facility is the limited available data about the current distribution and use of facilities, which limits a provider's ability to assess if there is sufficient demand for a new ECE facility in an area.

Local Code and Permitting

Providers must ensure their facilities meet local code and that they obtain all necessary permits for a renovation or new construction project. Some participants highlighted that zoning code language is not always conducive to siting or developing an ECE facility.[12] For example, providers noted that utility requirements can be difficult to understand until late in the process and some have had to pay for substantial public system upgrades.[13]

A survey and code review analysis conducted as part of this work confirmed that there is variation in local definitions and rules that often do not align with those of DCYF.[14] This survey also indicated that local jurisdiction planners would welcome ECE-specific guidance. The

[9] Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development. (2024). *Reducing Barriers to Developing Child Care Facilities Across Oregon.*
[10] Appendix A. Engagement Summary.
[11] Appendix A. Engagement Summary.
[12] Appendix A. Engagement Summary.
[13] Appendix A. Engagement Summary.
[14] Appendix B. Land Use Code Review and Surveys Summary.

Department of Commerce's Growth Management Services is currently working to develop a model ordinance and guidance related to ECE.

Challenges Specific to Rural Areas

Beyond the challenges all ECE providers face, providers in rural areas often contend with additional challenges.[15] These include:

- **Limited or seasonal demand due to lower population density and seasonal employment.** Low population density results in lower demand in an area, making it difficult to develop a sustainable business plan and to attract qualified staff. Similarly, some rural areas have seasonal employment patterns with an influx of workers for only part of the year that create inconsistent demand throughout the year.
- **High costs of transporting materials**. There is a high cost to transport materials to remote areas, which raises the cost of developing facilities.
- **Lack of access to capital**. While some rural communities have a lower cost of living compared to urban areas, lower incomes in rural communities can make it hard for providers to assemble adequate capital to develop a facility.
- **Fewer skilled providers, local planners, and contractors**. Rural areas often have fewer skilled workers in many professional services, including in ECE and building contractors who can develop ECE facilities. Similarly, staff at small, rural local jurisdictions may have limited capacity or knowledge to support providers or developers.
- **Limited infrastructure or aged existing infrastructure**. Rural areas often have limited access to utilities, particularly in undeveloped areas. Given many communities are under-resourced, existing infrastructure may be older or may need extensive modifications to be used for ECE. This limits the ability to provide ECE facilities in existing structures as renovations may be extensive and cost prohibitive.
- **Limited locations**. Many rural areas have large areas zoned for resource purposes such as agriculture or forestry, which may limit options for permitting ECE facilities.

[15] Human Services Administration for Children and Families. (2024). *Joint Resource Guide to Strengthen and Expand Child Care Facilities in Rural America.* Retrieved from https://www.rd.usda.gov/sites/default/files/rd_hhs-acf_jointchildcareresourceguide.pdf and Petros, C., Ryan, L., Visser, M., & Burton, T. (2024). *Reducing Barriers to Developing Child Care Facilities Across Oregon.* Retrieved from https://www.oregon.gov/lcd/ChildCareFacilities/Documents/12.19.24_HB2727_FINALReport.pdf

Total Statewide Costs to Meet Facilities Needs

This section presents high-level statewide need and cost estimates for ECE facilities. See Appendix E. ECE Facilities Needs and Costs for more detail and the sources and methodologies behind these numbers.

Of the 1.2 million children under the age of 13 in Washington, at least 172,000 to 216,000 are currently served by 9,000 to 9,600 providers in the statewide mixed-delivery system of licensed and/or publicly subsidized ECE.[16] To meet DCYF's goal of expanding access to early care and education opportunities under the Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan (ALW) beginning with expanding ECEAP entitlement in 2031, and continuation of supporting Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) income eligibility, the state would need an additional 1,400 to 6,000 facilities across a range of program types.

The cost of this facility expansion is estimated at **$3.3 to $12.6 billion**, a one-time investment that will allow the system to expand to serve between 860,000 to 1.4 million total children over twelve years (i.e., fiscal years 2030 – 2041). This amounts to a per child investment of $3,800 - $8,800 for each child served over those twelve years.[17]

The wide range of this estimate is due to two factors:

- **Uncertain future levels of participation.** ECE participation is influenced by factors including the availability and affordability of suitable care (e.g., care for the correct ages, locations, hours, and needs of children); labor force participation; and the birth rate and other demographic factors. The lower end of the cost range reflects lower participation in ECE services, and the higher end reflects higher participation.
- **Wide variation in facilities development costs.** ECE facility costs vary based on a variety of complex factors, including real estate costs, the type of construction, site conditions, site control, labor and material costs, and other factors that are highly dependent on specific project circumstances. In some cases, cost factors are interrelated; for example, rural areas may have cheaper land but more expensive labor and financing costs. In all cases, factors are nonlinear; for example, a renovation project may cost more or less than a comparable new construction project, depending on the type and age of facility, the labor and material costs used, site specifics, and other factors. The cost estimate is based on an average per-facility cost across facility types and geographies and calculated in 2026 dollars.

[16] Appendix E. ECE Facilities Needs and Costs.
[17] Appendix E. ECE Facilities Needs and Costs.

Methodology

The policy recommendations included in this *ECE Facilities Implementation Plan* are informed by existing work in Washington (see Building on Prior Efforts) community engagement (including ECE providers and facilities professionals), and exploration of comparable efforts in other states and nationally.

Six research questions guided this work:

1. Could existing space accommodate current facilities and have potential for scale?
2. How can DCYF better support providers and developers and other professionals?
3. What are the unique needs of rural communities?
4. What are the unique needs of Tribal communities?
5. What are the estimated aggregate costs to expand facilities statewide?
6. How can local jurisdictions better support providers, developers, and other professionals?

Specific elements of the methodology included:

- **Workgroup.** A workgroup of state agencies, local jurisdictions, advocacy organizations, design professionals, and providers met five times throughout this study to share knowledge and information; serve as a sounding board to stress-test ideas around challenges and solutions; shape recommendations; and review the draft report. See Acknowledgements for a list of workgroup members.
- **Research.** The study team conducted a review of literature on ECE facilities development; researched existing grants and resources available to providers in Washington; developed a timeline of advancements in ECE facilities development in Washington; and reviewed materials from the Commerce Early Learning Facilities (ELF) and Child Care Partnership Grants.
- **Interviews and focus groups.** The study team conducted interviews and focus groups with ECE providers, architects, school district representatives, state officials, and other ECE development professionals to inform the project findings and recommendations. The team conducted a total of 37 interviews and 6 focus groups with 57 total participants. Fifteen providers also submitted responses to questions using an online form. The team also reviewed ELF grantee interviews previously conducted by DCYF. See Appendix A. Engagement Summary for a full summary of findings.
- **Cost assessment.** The study team modeled demand for ECE slots and facilities by analyzing ELF data and other public funding sources and collecting and analyzing actual

provider cost data. See Appendix E. ECE Facilities Needs and Costs for a full summary of findings.

- **Local code review and survey.** A review of land use codes from 24 cities and counties across Washington state, along with online surveys distributed to planning staff from local jurisdictions statewide and Tribal Nations Planning and Public Works Professionals, were conducted to assess barriers contributing to Extreme Child Care Access Deserts, and to identify opportunities for reducing costs and administrative burdens to the development of ECE facilities. See Appendix B. Land Use Code Review and Surveys Summary for a full summary of findings.
- **Tribal engagement.** DCYF sought Tribal input to this ECE Facilities Implementation Plan through Dear Tribal Leader and Director letters; updates to the Indian Policy Early Learning (IPEL) Committee, which assesses the collective ECE needs of Tribal governments and Indian organizations; two Tribal engagement sessions; and surveys that invited participation from Tribal ECE professionals and public works professionals. Tribal participation in these efforts was limited and should not be interpreted as formal consultation or broad Tribal consensus regarding the recommendations contained within this report.

Recommendations

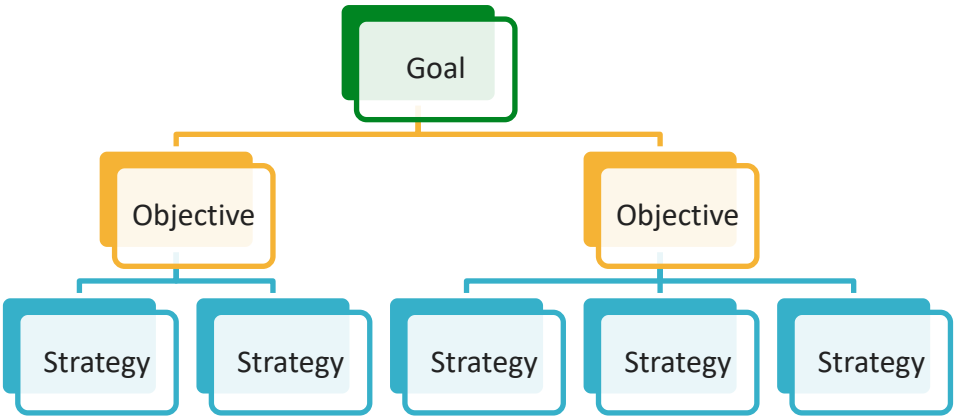
Structure of the Recommendations

The recommendations are organized into Goals, Objectives, and Strategies as illustrated in Exhibit 3.

- **Goals:** High-level aims that build toward the vision of having high-quality facility space that is accessible to all children and families, and benefits communities.
- **Objectives:** Specific targets toward the goals.
- **Strategies:** Achievable, measurable approaches to achieving the objectives and thus the goals. Each strategy includes the following details:
    - **Why it is important:** the relevance of the strategy to facilitating ECE facilities development.
    - **How it can be implemented:** The actions to operationalize the strategy. Some strategies include specific implementation actions while others require a short, initial “planning and design phase” to inform full implementation.

- **Resource(s) needed.** The type of resources needed to effectively implement the strategy, and whether initial implementation steps are possible within existing resources. See Resources for more information.
- **Roles.** The entities that will lead and support implementation of the strategy. See Roles for more information.

Exhibit 3. Plan Structure



Source: DCYF, 2026.

Resources

Successful implementation of each strategy will entail multiple types of resources, including both operating and capital funds. Resources also include:

- **Changes to laws or rules.** This may include:
  - **Revised Code of Washington (RCW).** Changes to state statute.
  - **Washington Administrative Code (WAC).** Changes to state rules and regulations.
- **Washington agency policy and procedures.** Changes to state agencies' policies or procedures.
  - **Local code.** Changes to local code.
- **Financial resources.** Depending on the strategy, this may include funding for one or more of the following:
  - **Provider capital grants.** Increased grant funding for providers and organizations that support providers.
  - **State Information Technology (IT) systems.** Updates to state infrastructure such as DCYF's IT systems.
  - **Contractors.** Consultant or facilitation support.

- **DCYF staff.** While DCYF can implement initial steps of some strategies with existing staff capacity, additional staff at DCYF is critical to successful plan implementation. For more detail on the specific roles of the DCYF staff identified in this Plan, see Descriptions of DCYF Staffing. Additional staffing may be needed at other agencies to support implementation of this plan, but this was not explored as part of this project.

  Given the State's forecasted fiscal deficit, public financial resources will likely be limited for the next few years, which will necessitate new partnerships and funding sources.

Roles

For each strategy, this *ECE Implementation Plan* identifies lead and supporting entities. Key players to support implementation of these recommendations include:

Advocacy organizations: Nonprofits and coalitions that can advocate for policy changes, secure public funding, and build the political will necessary to treat early learning as a public infrastructure priority.

Businesses: Employers and industry groups that support ECE through direct investment, workforce benefits, or by advocating for early learning as key to economic prosperity.

Developers: Professionals responsible for overall planning and execution of the construction of Early Care and Education facilities. They may own the property but not necessarily.

Educational institutions: Public and private K-12 and postsecondary schools, districts, and systems and State-Tribal education compact schools.

Financial institutions: Public and private financial institutions, including Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs), that provide the necessary capital, loans, and grants to support development.

Local jurisdictions: Cities and counties regulate zoning and land use, issue building permits, and local business licensing (business or home occupation licenses).

Philanthropy: Foundations and private donors who provide "catalytic capital," i.e., grants that fund innovation, bridge financing gaps, and support projects that may not qualify for traditional lending for the benefit of the community.

Property owners and managers: Owners or managers of public or private property who provide space for facilities through short or long-term leases, dedicated sales, or collocation agreements in mixed-use developments. Facilities include land for ONB programs.

Providers: The heart of the system; the diverse individuals and organizations—ranging from family home providers to large centers—that operate facilities to deliver early care and education. Providers can be licensed, certified, or certified for payment only.

State agencies: Any department, agency or other entity of a state government or a political subdivision of the State of Washington that impacts DCYF's responsibilities of ECE licensing, policy, and oversight and its mission. See Strategy 1.1.1 for an overview of many of these agencies and their roles.

State Legislature: The body that authorizes capital and operating appropriations and enacts laws that shape early learning policy.

Tribal Nations: Sovereign governments with inherent authority over their lands, citizens, governance systems, laws, regulations, and early care and education systems. Tribal ECE facilities development must be understood and supported within the context of Tribal sovereignty, self-determination, community-defined priorities, and government-to-government relationships. Tribal Nations may operate under Tribal constitutions, Tribal codes, land use plans, environmental review processes, building standards, licensing systems, and other Tribal regulatory requirements that govern facility development and operation within Tribal jurisdictions. Many state and local regulatory, permitting, and funding structures discussed throughout this report may not apply on Tribal lands or within Tribal governmental systems. Tribal sovereignty does not mean the absence of regulation; rather**,** Tribal Nations exercise governmental authority through their own laws, policies, and regulatory systems, often alongside applicable federal requirements. See Acknowledgements for additional information regarding Tribal engagement efforts related to this study.

Recommendations

As needed, DCYF will refine goals, objectives, and strategies over the course of the *ECE Facilities Implementation Plan* rollout in response to changing legislative, fiscal, and policy contexts. Estimated phasing for each strategy is summarized Summary of Strategy Roles and Resources and Proposed Phasing.

Goal 1: Public, private, and nonprofit sectors across the state coordinate and streamline ECE facilities development.

Objective 1.1: Increase coordination among State agencies in pursuit of a cohesive, data-informed approach to supporting ECE facilities development.

1.1.1. Convene an Interagency ECE Facilities Workgroup to strengthen coordination, identify opportunities to streamline ECE facilities development, and identify statewide facility goals.

Why this is important: Several state agencies support and regulate various components of ECE facilities development:

- DCYF licenses and supports ECE programs through funding and technical assistance.
- Commerce implements the ELF program.
- Department of Health manages health regulations that impact facilities.
- Department of Ecology can be involved in permitting of certain sites.
- Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction regulates facilities operated by school districts.
- Washington State Patrol's state fire marshals conduct building inspections in child care centers.
- State Building Code Committee defines state building code for facilities.

Some providers report that varying expectations and timelines across agencies create additional complexity and costs for ECE facilities development. To create a consistent, feasible process for providers, agencies must align and streamline their approaches to regulating ECE facilities development. No one agency can solve this alone, necessitating a collaborative effort.

There are many strategies throughout this *ECE Facilities Implementation Plan* that will benefit from the creation of this workgroup; each of those strategies explicitly references this strategy.

How this can be implemented: When resources are available, DCYF will identify the agencies that should participate in the Interagency ECE Facilities Workgroup and develop a charter, objectives, and timeline before convening the first meeting. One potential past model is the Washington State Child Health and Safety Advisory Committee, which acted as an ad hoc group focused on the health and safety of Washington children. One outcome from this group was creating a briefing paper on regulatory oversight of well water for Washington State Child Cares. This model can be employed within the strategy to systematically identify agency child care policies that are not aligned, and to revise those policies to eliminate barriers to the expansion of child care facilities. This effort will:

- Identify interagency dependencies in different ECE facilities development paths, including funding timelines (e.g., for ECE and affordable housing collocation projects); permitting and licensing processes; and technical assistance sources and resources.

- Identify opportunities to minimize those dependencies.
- Establish statewide targets for available slots and ECE facilities.[18]
- Identify data needs (see Strategy **Error! Reference source not found.** for more information). Representation from the Legislature could help identify new data that would be most helpful.

Implementation of workgroup recommendations would require coordination between DCYF and other agencies identified above and possible changes to statute, policy, or procedure.

Funding would enable DCYF to contract a third-party facilitator or increase staffing by one full-time equivalent (FTE) to facilitate the workgroup and connect these efforts to other ECE partners.

Resource(s) needed:

- Changes to laws and rules: RCW, WAC, and Washington agency rules
- Financial resources: Contractor; DCYF staff (Lead Role)

Roles:

- Lead(s): DCYF
- Support(s): Advocacy organizations, State agencies (including at least the agencies described above) and State Legislature.

1.1.2 Improve the state's data collection, use, and sharing to better inform ECE facility investment.

Why this is important: It is essential that data is complete and effectively utilized to:

- Support strategic development of ECE facilities where the need is greatest.
- Understand how well policies and investments address the needs of our state's diverse children, families, and providers.
- Communicate about the need for ECE facilities and build buy-in from potential partners like local jurisdictions, affordable housing providers, and employers.

[18] Statewide targets should not be interpreted as applying within Tribal governmental systems or on Tribal lands unless voluntarily identified through Tribal engagement.

Currently, data about key ECE facility issues is unavailable or incomplete, limiting the ability of state agencies, local jurisdictions, advocacy organizations, providers, and other partners to effectively make decisions. For example, there is a need for improved data about:

- **Total need for and supply of ECE facilities**, including licensed, certified, license exempt, and Tribally regulated programs. While the State has data about the licensed and/or publicly-subsidized ECE system that serves about 16-21% of Washington's 1.1 million children under the age of 13,[19] it has limited information about facilities that serve the remaining 79-84% of Washington's children.
- Potential future facilities.
- The costs to develop facilities using State funds like the ELF grant program.

How this can be implemented: As noted in Strategy 1.1.1, the Interagency ECE Facilities Workgroup will establish targets and data needs. New data will supplement existing data collection (e.g., DCYF surveys and ELF grantee reports) and could include:

- Current total need for and supply of ECE facilities, including licensed, certified, license exempt, and Tribally regulated programs. More complete information about projects funded with ELF funds such as time to project completion; cost of completion; utilization of ECEAP; projects not completed; and use of partners such as architects, developers, or general contractors. This will enable analysis of project-level cost drivers to inform regulatory and funding reforms.
- Information about State-owned land and buildings that might be suitable for ECE facilities.

The State will then collect, aggregate, and share data, including via existing dashboards offered through its Office of Innovation, Alignment, and Accountability.

Resource(s) needed.

- Changes to laws or rules: Not currently anticipated
- Financial resources: DCYF Staff (OIAA Positions); State IT Systems; Contractors

[19] Data comes from DCYF Office Of Innovation, Alignment and Accountability (OIAA) Need and Supply Dashboard Suite. Datafiles are updated and these are numbers from early 2026. Available at: https://dcyf.wa.gov/practice/oiaa/reports/early-learning-dashboards/child-care-need-supply-data

Roles:

- Lead(s): Interagency ECE Facilities Workgroup Facilitator (Contractor or DCYF Lead Role) with existing relevant datasets
- Support(s): Interagency ECE Facilities Workgroup members, Advocacy organizations, and State Legislature.

Objective 1.2: Engage the private sector as a core partner in ECE facilities development.

1.2.1 Support expansion of employer-supported ECE care, especially in businesses with non-traditional hours.

Why this is important: Employer-supported ECE can:

- Support the state economy. Employee turnover and missed work due to ECE access issues costs Washington employers an estimated $2.08 billion annually.[20]
- Increase the total supply of ECE in the state. This does not occur if an employer simply offers subsidy to their employees, but can occur when a provider offers on-site or off-site care through a contract with an ECE provider.
- Better meet the specific needs of employees, especially employees with low incomes and people of color. Employees that work evening or weekend hours, such as in hospitals or some manufacturing sites, may struggle to find ECE for their children during their work hours. People of color and people with lower incomes tend to be overrepresented in these jobs.[21] Employers that have many employees working nontraditional hours can better organize ECE to support these employees.

To incorporate employer-supported ECE care as an effective expansion strategy, facilities and resources are needed. Employers are not familiar with early learning or facility needs for ECE programs. Without supporting employers with understanding ECE facilities and program needs, and having access to develop these ECE programs, this would be an incomplete strategy for supporting their staff with early care and education needs.

[20] Washington State Department of Commerce, Child Care Collaborative Task Force (2022) *True Cost of Quality Child Care in WA.* Retrieved from here:

[21] Collier, Megan. (2021). *Child Care Access For Families with Non-Standard Work Hours*. Penn State Social Science Research Institute. Retrieved from: https://evidence2impact.psu.edu/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/2024/01/Access-to-Nonstandard-Child-Care_FINAL.pdf

How this can be implemented: This work will build on prior efforts, including:

- In 2019, the Collaborative Child Care Task Force made recommendations to the Legislature related to incentivizing employer-supported care.[22]
- The 2021 Fair Start for Kids Act included employer-supported care.
- The 2025 Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan.
- DCYF's 2026 work with University of Washington focuses on employer-supported care.

DCYF will use established foundations, such as Colorado's model[23] and research conducted by graduate students of the University of Washington's Evans School who completed a project to collect and analyze data to develop a comprehensive, evidence-based initial implementation plan for employer-supported child care in Washington state. The report will be complete in June 2026. Lastly, DCYF will partner with Commerce to assess prior efforts from 2019 Collaborative Child Care Task Force, that built the 2021 Fair Start for Kids Act employer supported care and determine next steps. The intention is to provide resources but not direct funding, to private employers.

Further implementation strategies will be determined after the planning and design phase concludes.

Resource(s) needed:

- Changes to laws or rules: Not currently anticipated
- Financial resources: Not currently anticipated

Roles:

- Lead(s): DCYF
- Support(s): Advocacy organizations, businesses, providers, and State Legislature

[22] Washington State Department of Commerce, Child Care Collaborative Task Force (2019) *Recommendations report to the Legislature under SHB 2367, Laws of 2018.* Retrieved from: https://www.commerce.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Report-Child-Care-Collaborative-Task-Force-2019-Final.pdf.

[23] Executive Partnering to Invest in Children (EPIC) is a membership organization with a model to highlight the vital role of the business community and employers in driving change and contributing to solutions in their communities. EPIC and the Economic Development Commission support cohorts of employers in planning and implementing ECE for their workforce.

Objective 1.3: Streamline facilities requirements at the state and local levels while maintaining health and safety requirements.

1.3.1 Align local ECE facility definitions and requirements with state child care licensing to avoid confusion and administrative challenges.

Why this is important: Some local land use regulations for ECE facilities are not aligned with current DCYF regulations, creating misinterpretation and inconsistent application.[24] For example:

- Some local jurisdictions impose home occupation requirements that can be incompatible with, and inconsistently applied to, licensed family home ECE programs.
- DCYF licensing regulations may allow for more capacity and can conflict with local jurisdiction limits on the number of children they can serve.
- DCYF has statewide licensing requirements for certain issues that some local jurisdictions also currently regulate, such as ensuring "safe passenger loading areas" or defining the number of children allowed in a facility.

How this can be implemented: DCYF and the Interagency ECE Facilities Workgroup will coordinate on state regulations such as the number of children in ECE facilities and square footage of buildings.

DCYF will coordinate with local jurisdictions to avoid duplicative or conflicting regulations where there are already state level licensing requirements for ECE facilities.

Resource(s) needed:

- Changes to laws or rules: Washington agency rules and local code
- Financial resources: DCYF staff (Lead Role)

Roles:

- Lead(s): DCYF
- Support(s): Advocacy organizations, interagency ECE Facilities Workgroup, local jurisdictions, and State Legislature

[24] Appendix B. Land Use Code Review and Surveys Summary.

1.3.2 Continue to evaluate and improve DCYF licensing regulations and increase transparency around the process.

Why this is important: As noted in Administrative Complexity, licensing regulations are one component of a system that can create challenges for ECE facilities development. Continued quality improvement ensures that licensing regulations minimize challenges while maintaining standards.

While DCYF has a quality improvement process, some providers and developers are unaware of this process or may be reluctant to participate.[25] Greater communications could build awareness and invite participation from providers and the development community to share ideas on the greatest opportunity for reform.

How this can be implemented: Additional funding to staff an FTE at DCYF would enable current licensing teams to continue their work and increase engagement, communications, and transparency around licensing rules, waivers, variances, rule reviews, rule changes, and forms assistance.

Resource(s) needed:

- Changes to laws or rules: WAC and Washington agency rules
- Financial resources: DCYF staff (Licensing Policy Position)

Roles:

- Lead(s): DCYF
- Support(s): Advocacy organizations, developers, providers, and State Legislature

1.3.3 Preference ECE facilities development in Washington State code.

Why this is important: Many aspects of essential public infrastructure, such as affordable housing, have access to legal and financial exemptions or provisions to support development. These exemptions are intended to accelerate permitting and shield developers from potential litigation that can add significant delays and cost. Including ECE in existing state code exemptions would create a more predictable environment for facilities development which could add ECE facilities.

[25] See Appendix A. Engagement Summary.

How this can be implemented: A planning and design phase will allow DCYF in collaboration with other state agencies to research the feasibility of state code tax incentives for ECE facilities, such as exempting ECE facilities from energy code requirements; property- or sales tax waivers; density bonuses; fee waivers; Business & Occupation tax rate reductions or credits; or conversion of existing building use requirements. Further implementation strategies will be determined after the planning and design phase concludes.

Resource(s) needed:

- Changes to laws or rules: RCW and WAC
- Financial resources: DCYF staff (Lead Role)

Roles:

- Lead(s): DCYF
- Support(s): Advocacy organizations, developers, financial institutions, State Legislature, and other state agencies

Goal 2: There are adequate financial resources and technical support for ECE facilities development.

Objective 2.1: Supply anyone looking to develop or support ECE facilities with appropriate and timely information and technical assistance.

2.1.1 Centralize licensing information on DCYF's website in multiple languages.

Why this is important: The process to license an ECE facility requires many interconnected steps and actors. To support facilities development in this context, supporting information should be comprehensive yet curated, consolidated, and available in multiple languages.

While DCYF's website currently hosts informative resources, there is no single, authoritative reference manual for licensing. Further, multiple technical assistance resources exist or are underway around the state, but there is no centralized location or platform to locate them. Engagement for this study also surfaced some gaps in available information, such as guidance on design, permitting, and funding sources.

How this can be implemented: DCYF will evaluate its existing webpages related to licensing ECE programs and develop a plan to consolidate resources into a concise licensing toolkit. Toolkit development will include translation into the most spoken languages by providers, including Spanish and Somali. This toolkit will be reviewed annually to ensure it remains current as regulations evolve.

Additional funding would enable DCYF to establish and host a provider toolkit of additional resources. Potential resources could include:

- Step-by-step project development pathways, sample budgets, timelines, and feasibility tools.
- Virtual facility tours, either as new content or links to existing tours on provider websites.
- Instructions for how to connect with development professionals, landlords, and real estate agents.
- Information about existing provider coaching and cohort models, such as those offered by Imagine U, Early Achievers, The LOVIT Way, Enterprise, and the CCA network.
- Recommendations and resources for furniture, fixtures, and equipment.
- Guides for planning and zoning requirements.
- Guidance about financing options, including risks, long-term obligations, application requirements, loan terms, and rates.

All online information will ensure accessibility (using the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines), including intuitive navigation and use of plain talk.

Resource(s) needed:

- Changes to laws or rules: Not currently anticipated
- Financial resources: State IT Systems; Contractors

Roles:

- Lead(s): DCYF
- Support(s): Advocacy organizations, financial institutions, philanthropy, providers, and State Legislature

2.1.2 Increase staffing for DCYF's one-on-one pre-licensing support.

Why this is important: One-on-one pre-licensing support can be an essential resource to ensure a provider developing a facility for the first time can effectively navigate the requirements. Currently, DCYF provides direct pre-licensing assistance to those interested in developing an ECE facility, including assessing site feasibility; reviewing facility or site plans; and offering guidance related to licensing requirements. To support the increased number of facilities needed to meet DCYF's ECE vision, there is a need to expand pre-licensing support. The *ALW Implementation Plan* covered the need for additional licensing staff.

How this can be implemented: Currently, eight pre-licensing specialists support new inquiries for the state. Additional funding would enable DCYF to expand its pre-licensing unit by adding pre-licensing specialists. This additional capacity would reduce existing caseloads and allow staff to provide focused, personalized assistance to those looking to develop an ECE facility.

NOTE: While pre-licensing specialists provide one-on-one-support prior to a license being issued, the provider is then connected with a child care licensor to provide ongoing supports. Staffing need for child care licensors is included in the ALW Plan.

Resource(s) needed:

- Changes to laws or rules: Not currently anticipated
- Financial resources: DCYF staff (Pre-Licensing Positions)

Roles:

- Lead(s): DCYF
- Support(s): Advocacy organizations, State Legislature

2.1.3 Increase access to construction management technical assistance.

Why this is important: Most providers' expertise lies in early childhood development, not facilities development. Technical assistance for facilities development can address this issue by reducing risks and barriers to providers while freeing them to focus their energy on developing healthy, safe, and high-quality programs.

Access to technical assistance is currently inequitably distributed. Some providers have strong access, either because they are large enough to pay for professional services or because they have family or friends willing to volunteer their time or

work below market rates. However, many providers do not have access to this expertise and must navigate an unfamiliar process themselves, which often leads to delays and associated cost increases.[26]

How this can be implemented: Additional funding can enable DCYF to expand access to technical assistance through two pathways:

- **A pilot project for professional construction management.** From September 2024 to June 2025, DCYF conducted an Early Learning Facilities Capital Readiness Pilot Project (see Appendix F. DCYF Capital Readiness Plan) that provided technical expertise to nine providers that expanded, remodeled, purchased, or constructed ECE facilities. Additional funding would enable DCYF to partner with Commerce to conduct a second pilot project to expand on this prior work, including through collaboration with advocacy organizations already doing similar work. This pilot would connect providers with professional project managers and owners' representatives[27] and provide information to project managers and owner's representatives about needs specific to ECE development.
- **Expanded access to provider coaching and cohort models.** With additional funding, DCYF will also invest further in increasing existing provider coaching and cohort models, such as those offered by Imagine U, Early Achievers, LOVIT Way, Enterprise, and the CCA network.

Resource(s) needed:

- Changes to laws or rules: Not currently anticipated
- Financial resources: Provider capital grants; Contractors; DCYF staff (Lead Role)

Roles:

- Lead(s): DCYF
- Support(s): Advocacy organizations, financial institutions, and philanthropy

[26] Appendix A. Engagement Summary.

[27] The full report that informs Appendix E. ECE Facilities Needs and Costs includes an Appendix with a comprehensive list of typical project tasks that an owner's representative completes on behalf of the ECE provider undergoing a renovation or development of a facility. Appendix E. ECE Facilities Needs and Costs

2.1.4 Collaborate with Commerce to provide siting guidance to local jurisdictions.

Why this is important: As noted in Local Code and Permitting, local regulations can be one component of a challenging system for developing ECE facilities. The local jurisdiction survey highlighted that local jurisdictions desire specific guidance on best practices for siting ECE programs.[28]

How this can be implemented: Commerce's Growth Management Services is currently developing a model ordinance and guidance for jurisdictions related to siting ECE facilities including:

- A model ordinance code for ECE development.
- Guidance and best practices for ECE-specific siting or exemptions that encourage facilities development across zones (e.g., design standards, outdoor play structures, parking, drop-off and pick-up, landscaping, proximity to industrial uses, frontage, buffering requirements, visual and noise barriers, neighbor notification requirements). Exemptions may address when a proposed ECE use triggers nonconforming site upgrades.
- Best practices to streamline permitting for ECE facilities and reduce or remove fees.
- Building code considerations for family home ECE siting in middle housing, such as multiplex apartments, accessory dwelling units (ADUs), and other dense residential buildings.
- Policies and programs to incentivize and prioritize ECE facilities development.
- Guidance on integrating ECE into comprehensive plans and development regulations, including approaches and resources for local supply and demand forecasts and the impacts of other planning elements (e.g., housing or transportation) on ECE facilities.

Once this work is complete, Commerce can collaborate with DCYF on how DCYF can support implementation.

DCYF may develop additional guidance based on further land use research.

Resource(s) needed:

[28] Appendix B. Land Use Code Review and Surveys Summary.

- Changes to laws or rules: Not currently anticipated
- Financial resources: Not currently anticipated

Roles:

- Lead(s): Commerce
- Support(s): DCYF and local jurisdictions

Objective 2.2: Provide multiple funding sources, including public, private, and public/private partnerships, to support provider capital funding needs.

2.2.1 Maximize capital budget investments in the State's ELF program.

Why this is important: The cost to develop facilities is a significant barrier for ECE programs that already struggle to maintain day-to-day operations in a resource-constrained environment.[29] The ELF program that Commerce administers in partnership with DCYF helps ECEAP contractors and WCCC providers to develop ECE facilities and classrooms necessary to support opportunities for eligible children and families, typically from households with low incomes. Between 2017 and 2025, the ELF Fund created over 13,600 early learning slots and leveraged nearly $340 million in non-state resources.[30]

How this can be implemented: ECE advocates, DCYF, and Commerce will continue to demonstrate the critical nature of continued and expanded funding to legislators by sharing stories, including using the improved data (see Strategy 1.1.2) about funded projects and the number of children served. As part of this advocacy, DCYF and its partners will emphasize the need to continue to include minor renovation grants to retain existing ECE capacity.

Resource(s) needed:

- Changes to laws or rules: Not currently anticipated
- Financial resources: Provider capital grants

[29] National construction cost indices show year over year labor costs increasing 5.6% on average and materials increasing over the same period at 9.1%. Mortenson, Seattle Construction Cost Index, Q4, 2025. Available at: https://www.mortenson.com/cost-index/seattle

[30] Between 2017 and 2025, total project costs were $542 million of which ELF grants funded about $200 million. The difference between projected costs and grant amounts is funded from other sources such as other grants, private contributions, or other financing options (Department of Commerce, Early Learning Facilities Awards Project List, 2024).

Roles:

- Lead(s): Advocacy organizations and State Legislature
- Support(s): Commerce and DCYF

2.2.2 Support direct and flexible Tribal ECE facilities funding approaches.

Why this is important: While the ELF Program is an essential funding source for many providers, it is not currently designed to fully align with Tribal sovereignty, governance structures, land status, infrastructure realities, or Tribal decision-making processes, and therefore may not adequately support Tribal Nations.

Many state funding models and competitive grant structures are designed around assumptions that do not reflect Tribal governmental systems, reservation land status, infrastructure access, application and development timelines, or community-defined priorities. Tribal Nations are sovereign governments with distinct legal, jurisdictional, and operational considerations that differ from state and local systems.

Current program and legislative restrictions that prohibit land-only acquisition may unintentionally limit Tribal Nations' ability to develop future ECE facilities. On some reservations, suitable and buildable land is limited due to land status, infrastructure access, environmental considerations, or jurisdictional constraints. Greater flexibility in allowable uses of funding may better support Tribal facility development.

A dedicated, direct, flexible, and ongoing funding approach may better support Tribal Nations in developing ECE facilities in alignment with self-determined priorities and community needs. While not specific to early learning facilities, previous approaches, such as the Tribal Early Learning Fund (TELF), were designed to provide more direct and flexible Tribal access to funding that better aligned with Tribal governance structures, infrastructure realities, and community-defined priorities. The TELF program was not funded in the 2025–2027 biennium.

How this can be implemented: Tribal Nations may pursue direct legislative appropriations or other funding mechanisms that support Tribal ECE facilities development in alignment with Tribal sovereignty and self-determined priorities. If funding is appropriated for Tribal ECE facility support, DCYF's Office of Tribal Relations will coordinate with Tribal Nations regarding implementation approaches and funding processes that honor Tribal sovereignty, government-to-government

relationships, Tribal decision-making timelines, infrastructure realities, and community-defined priorities.

Resource(s) needed:

- Changes to laws or rules: Not currently anticipated
- Financial resources: Provider capital grants

Roles:

- Lead(s): State Legislature and Tribal Nations
- Support(s): Advocacy organizations, DCYF, and providers

2.2.3 Replenish the WELL fund.

Why this is important: Many providers self-finance ECE facility projects with credit cards and personal loans because they cannot access traditional loans.[31] The WELL Fund offers access to capital with more flexible credit requirements and repayment terms than traditional lenders. The program also provides grants and technical assistance for topics including finance, facilities design, and project management. The fund has expended most of its resources, necessitating an effort to replenish it to continue to connect providers to this financing and add to ECE supply. New capital could help to address some of the following known needs:

- Predevelopment and bridge financing to address cash flow challenges created by reimbursement-based grants.
- Upfront payment models or revolving funds to reduce provider financial risk.
- Startup funding (e.g., furniture, staff, utilities, rent).
- Additional funding could also enable this group to explore the feasibility of establishing a social impact Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT). There is at least one example which increases access to ECE facilities by purchasing or building ECE facilities and leasing them to vetted providers.

How this can be implemented: The WELL Partners (Washington Community Reinvestment Association, Enterprise, and Craft3) can explore options to refine existing resources about the WELL fund and the benefits of participating and set up meetings related to recapitalization and potential establishment of a REIT.

[31] Appendix A. Engagement Summary.

Resource(s) needed:

- Changes to laws or rules: Not currently anticipated
- Financial resources: Provider capital grants

Roles:

- Lead(s): Financial Institutions
- Support(s): Advocacy organizations, philanthropy, and State Legislature

Goal 3: ECE facilities development is supported by cost-effective solutions.

Objective 3.1: Use existing, available public property for ECE facilities.

3.1.1 Consider pathways for governments to master lease or transfer property for ECE facilities.

Why this is important: The State and some local governments have underutilized space, land, and surplus property that could be used for ECE facilities either through a lease, purchase, or transfer. Repurposing existing space can be more effective than building new.

How this can be implemented: In a planning and design phase, DCYF will connect with the Office of Financial Management regarding their inventory of state-owned facilities and land and how to explore the feasibility of locating ECE facilities in these spaces. The Interagency ECE Facilities Workgroup described in Strategy 1.1.1 will also discuss this topic, and will identify what rules will need to change. Further implementation strategies, including opportunities to use local jurisdiction space for ECE facilities, will be determined after the planning and design phase concludes.

Resource(s) needed:

- Changes to laws or rules: RCW and WAC
- Financial resources: DCYF staff (Lead Role)

Roles:

- Lead(s): DCYF
- Support(s): Interagency ECE Facilities Workgroup, local jurisdiction, state agencies, and Office of Financial Management

3.1.2 Explore feasibility of expanding access to ECE facilities in educational institutions where space is available.

Why this is important: Many school districts, Tribal Compact schools, and higher education institutions face declining enrollment that is freeing up space in existing facilities, and demographic projections expect enrollment to remain low in the future.[32] This offers an opportunity to use existing space for ECE facilities, offering simultaneous benefits of increased ECE access and full facility utilization for educational institutions. Educational institutions also have experience with capital projects and have access to the School Construction Assistance Program as well as authority to issue debt, which can support revenue generation for ECE facilities development and operations.

K-12 schools and ECE are a natural fit: both share a mission of childhood education, both focus on child safety and wellbeing, and colocation can create continuity of experience for families as their children develop into school-age students.

How this can be implemented: DCYF will partner with relevant agencies to lead a planning and design phase to:

- Explore opportunities for providers in the mixed-delivery ECE system to partner with education agencies, ranging from K-12 districts, Tribal Compact schools to higher education.
- Consider strategies to ensure consistent access to space for ECE providers if enrollment trends change.
- Explore how licensing for ECE facilities can be aligned with K-12 school building standards while maintaining health and safety standards.

Further implementation strategies will be determined after the planning and design phase concludes, including what rules will need to be changed.

Resource(s) needed:

- Changes to laws or rules: RCW, WAC
- Financial resources**:** DCYF staff (Lead Role)

[32] According to the National Center for Education Statistics 2023 data and Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction's Report Card Enrollment data for 2014-2024, enrollment at public schools was 4% lower in the 2024-25 academic year than in 2019-20. The projected change in enrollment from 2022-2031 is -6% for K-8 and -9% for grades 9-12.

Roles:

- Lead(s): DCYF
- Support(s): Advocacy organizations, educational institutions, state agencies, and State Legislature

3.1.3 Facilitate use of off-site play spaces to fulfill licensed outdoor play area requirements.

Why this is important: Securing adequate outdoor play space is a challenge, particularly in urban areas and for outdoor nature-based (ONB) programs. Surplus or underutilized public land could provide opportunities to fulfill licensed outdoor play area requirements at a reduced cost. While use of public lands for ECE purposes may be an option in some areas, it may not always be straight forward.[33]

How this can be implemented: DCYF will explore formalizing partnerships between providers and land managers in a planning and design phase. This may include:

- Development of a template memorandum of understanding and/or use agreement, using the ONB template as a model and drawing from lessons learned during the process to develop that template.
- Expanded resources and tools to help ECE providers meet outdoor play space rules through use of public lands, such as through promoting tools like the State Recreation and Conservation Office's online GIS map of all local, state, and federal lands.

Further implementation strategies will be determined after the planning and design phase concludes.

Resource(s) needed:

- Changes to laws or rules: RCW, WAC, Washington agency rules, and local code
- Financial resources: Not currently anticipated

Roles:

- Lead(s): DCYF

[33] De Lapparent, Alvarez, Aina. (2024). In child care desert, Camano's pioneering forest school faces shutdown. HeraldNet, January 24. Retrieved from: In child care desert, Camano's pioneering forest school faces shutdown | HeraldNet.com

- Support(s): Local jurisdictions, property owners and managers, providers, state agencies, and State Legislature

Objective 3.2: Streamline licensing options to minimize costs and increase flexibility.

3.2.1 Support continued expansion of Outdoor Nature-Based (ONB) programs.

Why this is important: ONB programs are a newer licensing model. Because the model is newer, there is opportunity to continue to refine and expand the program.

Provider interviews revealed that many ONB programs also offer traditional ECE. Currently, this model requires two separate licenses, increasing complexity for providers.

How this can be implemented: DCYF will conduct a planning and design phase to:

- Explore streamlining requirements for ONB and traditional ECE programs to allow one license to cover both programs.
- Explore expanding age groups in ONB licensed programs and systematic changes to accommodate hybrid indoor-outdoor ONB programs in all settings.
- Increase communications around ONB program benefits with other sectors.

Further implementation strategies will be determined after the planning and design phase concludes.

Resource(s) needed:

- Changes to laws or rules: RCW, WAC, and Washington agency rules
- Financial resources: Not currently anticipated

Roles:

- Lead(s): DCYF
- Support(s): Property owners and managers, providers, state agencies, local jurisdictions and State Legislature

3.2.2 Offer flexible regulatory models to enable more small-scale centers without compromising health or safety.

Why this is important: Regulatory and support frameworks targeted toward very small centers (i.e., with approximately 30 children or fewer) can reduce administrative and facilities-related challenges. This can make it financially feasible

for small centers to operate programs in rural areas with smaller populations and within neighborhood retail, commercial buildings, and other community facilities. Flexible regulatory pathways, revised rules, and opportunities to develop shared services models would better support current conditions, new operational models including employer-supported care, and expansion of existing facilities.

How this can be implemented: DCYF will conduct a planning and design phase to explore regulatory models beyond the existing categories (i.e., family home, center, school-age, and ONB) that could enable smaller-scale programs to operate without compromising on health and safety. Options to explore include:

- A program category for midsize programs of up to 30 children. Exploration will consider current local code, zoning requirements, and Title 110 WAC, Children, Youth, and Families, Department of.
- Removal of the residency requirement for family home program providers to allow licensed family home providers (which care for up to 12 children, or 16 children with a capacity waiver) to provide services in settings outside of their primary residence, such as commercial, residential, educational, retail, or community spaces. Exploration will ensure feasibility of this approach given local and state building code definitions while upholding health and safety standards.
- Hub-and- spoke networks, also known as shared-services models. In combination with the above strategies, this approach treats small sites (i.e., with one or two classrooms) as satellites of a larger licensed center or intermediary organization that provides administration, staffing support, curriculum, and substitute teachers. This approach makes small-scale centers more financially viable and affordable for families by reducing administrative burdens, supporting workforce stability, and enabling economies of scale (e.g., pooled insurance). DCYF's recent Organizational Licensing Pilot has examined the licensing and streamlining options for multisite centers and will inform this strategy.

Further implementation strategies will be determined after the planning and design phase concludes.

Resource(s) needed:

- Changes to laws or rules: RCW, WAC, Washington agency rules, and local code

- Financial resources: DCYF staffing (Facilities Project Specialist)

Roles:

- Lead(s): DCYF
- Support(s): Providers, State Legislature, State agencies, and Local jurisdictions

Objective 3.3: Explore ways to better meet ECE facilities needs in small-town and rural areas.

3.3.1 Explore alternative construction methods to reduce timelines and costs.

Why this is important: Modular construction is emergent in the ECE space and holds promise to reduce facility costs for some locations, in particular rural areas and small towns where land is less constrained. For example, some providers have repurposed K-12 school portables to add capacity at a low cost.

Modular construction can allow for many benefits, including:

- Faster timelines. Buildings can be installed in weeks.
- Greener building processes. The factory-controlled process generates less waste and is energy efficient.[34]
- Lower costs than traditional construction methods.
- Customizations to ECE licensing requirements such as child-height fixtures.
- The ability to scale and relocate as needed.[35]

How this can be implemented: Through a planning and design phase, DCYF will work with advocacy organizations and providers who have successfully opened modular facilities to determine how modular buildings may be an option for a pre-approved model for ECE programs that meet state and local regulatory requirements. Project data from successful modular projects will inform the ELF program and can be incorporated into the ECE facilities toolkit.

DCYF will also explore opportunities to identify surplus school portables and connect them to providers.

Further implementation strategies will be determined after the planning and design phase concludes.

[34] Retrieved from: https://www.modular.org/what-is-modular-construction/
[35] Retrieved from: https://www.modulargenius.com/lc/modular-buildings-for-childcare-centers-benefits-and-features.html

Resource(s) needed:

- Changes to laws or rules: Not currently anticipated
- Financial resources: DCYF staff (Facilities Project Specialist)

Roles:

- Lead(s): DCYF
- Support(s): Advocacy organizations, educational institutions, and providers

Summary of Strategy Roles and Resources and Proposed Phasing

The table below summarizes the recommendations, including the Lead(s), Support(s), Phase, and Resources needed. The three phases are as follows:

- Phase 1: first biennium FY27-FY29: what we can do with current resources
- Phase 2: next two biennia FY29-FY31: next steps
- Phase 3: FY31 onward: depends on Legislative investment

The phase assigned to a strategy represents an estimated starting point, not a guarantee. Longer strategies may begin in one phase and extend into another. Progress for all strategies will depend on funding and capacity within the agency, as well as external factors such as the state budget, state priorities, and broader economic conditions.

For more details on the specific roles of the DCYF staff identified in this table, see Descriptions of DCYF Staffing.

EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION FACILITIES IMPLEMENTATION PLAN					
Goal 1: Public, private, and nonprofit sectors across the state coordinate and streamline ECE facilities development.					
Strategies	**Lead(s)**	**Support(s)**	**Phase**	**Resource: Changes to laws or rules**	**Resource: financial resources**
1.1.1. Convene an Interagency ECE Facilities Workgroup to strengthen coordination, identify opportunities to streamline ECE facilities development, and identify statewide facility goals.	DCYF	Advocacy organizations, State agencies (including at least the agencies described in the strategy), and State Legislature	Phase 1	RCW, WAC, and Washington Agency rules	Contractor; DCYF staff (Lead Role)
1.1.2. Improve the state's data collection, use, and sharing to better inform ECE facility investment.	Interagency ECE Facilities Workgroup Facilitator (Contractor or DCYF Lead Role) with existing relevant datasets	Interagency ECE Facilities Workgroup, Advocacy organizations and State Legislature	Phase 1	Not currently anticipated	DCYF Staff (OIAA Positions); State IT Systems; Contractors
1.2.1. Support expansion of employer-supported ECE care, especially in businesses with **non-traditional** hours.	DCYF	Advocacy organizations, businesses, providers, and State Legislature	Phase 1	Not currently anticipated	Not currently anticipated
1.3.1. Align local ECE facility definitions with current state licensing definitions to avoid confusion and administrative challenges.	DCYF	Interagency ECE Facilities Workgroup, Advocacy organizations, local jurisdictions, and State Legislature	Phase 1	Washington agency rules and local code	DCYF staff (Lead Role)
1.3.2. Continue to evaluate and improve DCYF licensing regulations and increase transparency around the process.	DCYF	Advocacy organizations, developers, providers, and State Legislature	Phase 1	WAC and Washington agency rules	DCYF staff (Licensing Policy Position)
1.3.3. Preference ECE facilities development in Washington State code.	DCYF	Advocacy organizations, developers, financial institutions, and State Legislature	Phase 3	RCW and WAC	DCYF staff (Lead Role)

Goal 2: There are adequate financial resources and technical support for ECE facilities development.

Strategies	Lead	Support(s)	Phase	Resource: Changes to laws or rules	Resource: financial resources
2.1.1. Centralize licensing information on DCYF's website in multiple languages.	DCYF	Advocacy organizations, financial institutions, philanthropy, providers, and State Legislature	Phase 1	Not currently anticipated	State IT Systems; Contractors
2.1.2. Increase staffing for DCYF's one-on-one pre-licensing support.	DCYF	Advocacy organizations, State Legislature	Phase 1	Not currently anticipated	DCYF staff (Pre-Licensing Positions)
2.1.3. Increase access to construction management technical assistance.	DCYF	Advocacy organizations, financial institutions, and philanthropy	Phase 3	Not currently anticipated	Provider capital grants; Contractors; DCYF staff (Lead Role)
2.1.4. Collaborate with Commerce to provide siting guidance to local jurisdictions.	Commerce	DCYF and local jurisdictions	Phase 1	Not currently anticipated	Not currently anticipated
2.2.1. Maximize capital budget investments in the State's ELF program.	Advocacy organizations and State Legislature	Commerce and DCYF	Phase 2	Not currently anticipated	Provider capital grants
2.2.2 Support direct and flexible Tribal ECE facilities funding approaches.	State Legislature and Tribal Nations	Advocacy organizations, DCYF, and providers	Phase 2	Not currently anticipated	Provider capital grants
2.2.3. Replenish the WELL fund.	Financial institutions	Advocacy organizations, philanthropy, and State Legislature	Phase 3	Not currently anticipated	Provider capital grants

Goal 3: ECE facilities development is supported by cost-effective solutions.

Strategies	Lead	Support(s)	Phase	Resource: Changes to Laws or Rules	Resource: Financial Resources
3.1.1. Consider pathways for governments to master lease or transfer property for ECE facilities.	DCYF	Interagency ECE Facilities Workgroup, local jurisdictions, state agencies and Office of Financial Management	Phase 2	RCW and WAC	DCYF staff (Lead Role)
3.1.2. Explore feasibility of expanding access to ECE facilities in educational institutions where space is available.	DCYF	Advocacy organizations, educational institutions, state agencies and State Legislature	Phase 2	RCW, WAC, and Washinton agency rules	DCYF staff (Lead Role)
3.1.3. Facilitate use of off-site play spaces to fulfill licensed outdoor play area requirements.	DCYF	Property owners and managers, local jurisdictions, state agencies, State Legislature and providers	Phase 1	RCW, WAC, Washington agency rules, and local code	Not currently anticipated
3.2.1. Support continued expansion of Outdoor Nature-Based (ONB) programs.	DCYF	Property owners and managers, state agencies, local jurisdictions, State Legislature and providers	Phase 1	RCW, WAC, and Washington agency rules	Not currently anticipated
3.2.2. Offer flexible regulatory models to enable more small-scale centers without compromising health or safety.	DCYF	Providers, State Legislature, state agencies and local jurisdictions	Phase 3	RCW, WAC, Washington agency rules, and local code	DCYF staff (Facilities Project Specialist)
3.3.1. Explore alternative construction methods to reduce timelines and costs.	DCYF	Advocacy organizations, educational institutions, and providers	Phase 3	Not currently anticipated	DCYF staff (Facilities Project Specialist)

Descriptions of DCYF Staffing

Lead Role

- 1 FTE (permanent). Additional funding is needed to support this existing position beyond June 2027.
- Serve as the lead for status updates for this *ECE Implementation Plan* and the *ALW Implementation Plan*, reflecting the ongoing facilities work and maintaining accurate projections for expansion.
- Serve as the interagency coordinator focused on aligning state and local jurisdictions definitions and data collection systems to better assess ECE facilities needs and costs.
- Collaborate with local jurisdictions, state agencies and others to identify available properties to expand ECE services through educational institutions, and local and state buildings.

OIAA Positions

- 1 FTE (permanent)
    - Act as a Business Intelligence (BI) Analyst developing, maintaining, and publishing replicable complex analytic datasets, data products, and dashboard, external and internal to the agency.
    - Using geographic information systems (GIS), the BI Analyst would access internal DCYF and publicly available datasets to visually represent ECE facilities.
- 1 FTE (permanent)
    - Evaluate plans and manage research activities related to ECE facility expansion.
    - Evaluate existing research and evaluations to inform a prioritization model to identify critical considerations in the placement of future facilities.
    - Provide appropriate data sources, conduct statistical or data analysis, and reports findings that ultimately will enhance state and agency policy, practice, and services available to families and children in Washington.

Licensing Policy Position

- 1 FTE (permanent)
    - Increase engagement with community.
    - Develop, update, and review communications.

- Develop plan to increase transparency around licensing rules, waivers, variances, rule reviews, and forms assistance.
- Support WAC review.

Pre-Licensing Positions

- 1 FTE (permanent)
  - Supervise 4 new FTEs.
  - Support pre-licensors.
  - Provide high-level review, approvals of applicants, and applications.
  - Provide guidance and manage workflow of pre-licensing processes in their unit.
- 1 FTE (permanent)
  - Act as health specialist.
  - Support applicants in plan reviews.
  - Provide higher-level expertise in health and safety requirements for ECE providers.
  - Support applicants in preparation of ECE facility requirements.
- 4 FTEs (permanent)
  - Act as pre-licensors.
  - Provide technical assistance and support providers in the process to obtain ECE licensure.
  - Review documents, pre-service trainings, and WAC requirements.
  - Prepare provider for meeting WAC requirements for ECE licensure.
  - Provide one-on-one support to provider and hosts cohorts for applicants.

Facilities Project Specialist

- 1 FTE (project)
  - Lead the planning and design phase to explore alternative construction methods to reduce timelines and costs for ECE programs.
  - Research how other states and jurisdictions are using modular buildings.
  - Work with advocacy organizations and ECE providers who have opened ECE programs within modular buildings to identify opportunities for scaling.

- Review state and local code to identify regulatory requirements.

Progress Measurement

Progress measurement will involve the following components:

- **Track progress.** Every two years, DCYF will report on progress toward the recommendations outlined in this *ECE Facilities Implementation Plan*. This will include outcomes across metrics established by the Interagency ECE Facilities Workgroup described in Strategy 1.1.1.
- **Update and refine strategies.** This *ECE Facilities Implementation Plan* is not static. Strategies and their timelines for implementation will evolve based on lessons learned through implementation, community engagement, and the emerging context of the state fiscal environment.

Conclusion and Next Steps

This *ECE Facilities Implementation Plan* recognizes that ECE is foundational to the state's economic stability, children's healthy development, and community wellbeing. It charts a path toward building a more accessible, equitable, and sustainable ECE system, building on the foundation of efforts to-date and reflecting the priorities and perspectives of communities across the state. Both the timing and scale of the strategies outlined in the *ECE Facilities Implementation Plan* are scalable and can be adjusted to reflect our state's evolving fiscal context.

As DCYF implements this plan, it will continue its commitment to consultation, collaboration, and coordination with Tribal governments in the development of policies, agreements, and program implementation that may directly affect Tribal Nations. DCYF will conduct this essential work through ongoing meetings with the IPEL committee, regular communication, and opportunities for meaningful government-to-government dialogue regarding future ECE facilities work.

Success of this *ECE Facilities Implementation Plan* will require dedicated capacity within DCYF to drive the work forward and measure progress, continued collaboration with communities and partners, and sustained commitment from the State Legislature. Policymakers will need to decide:

- Which strategies to fund in the next biennium and future biennia.
- Whether to expand capital funding for facilities.
- Whether to change laws to reduce barriers.

DCYF will use this *ECE Implementation Plan* to develop budget requests and policy proposals in future biennia to support implementation of the prioritized ECE facilities recommendations.

For questions regarding the *ECE Facilities Implementation Plan*, please contact DCYF's Government Affairs team at dcyf.govaffairs@dcyf.wa.gov.

Appendices

Appendix A. Engagement Summary

A summary of key themes raised during engagement conducted for this *ECE Facilities Implementation Plan.*

Appendix B. Land Use Code Review and Surveys Summary

A summary of key themes from a review of land use codes from 24 cities and counties across Washington and from online surveys distributed to planning staff from local Washington jurisdictions' and Tribal Nations' planning and public works staff.

Appendix C. Early Learning Facilities Catalog

A summary of key state developments in ECE facilities, including legislation, studies, and major investments, as of early 2025 to inform this *ECE Facilities Implementation Plan.*

Appendix D. DCYF Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan

A 2025 DCYF publication that outlines a comprehensive set of scalable policy recommendations to implement a universally accessible, publicly funded ECE system in 10 years.

Appendix E. ECE Facilities Needs and Costs

An interim deliverable to estimate the need for and cost of ECE facilities to meet DCYF's goal of expanding WCCC under the Access and Living Wage, beginning with income eligibility expansion in 2030 and ECEAP entitlement expansion in 2031.

Appendix F. DCYF Capital Readiness Plan

A 2025 DCYF publication that summarizes the Capital Readiness Pilot Project, an innovative, relationship-based approach to preparing early learning programs for facility expansion by creating structured partnerships between child care providers and design professionals.