



2024 COMMUNITY CHILD CARE FORUMS SUMMARY REPORT



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Licensing Division and Nicole Rose, Assistant Secretary Early Learning



Washington State Department of
CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

Introduction

In 2024, DCYF reaffirmed our commitment to strengthening partnerships with the child care community by hosting a series of Community Child Care Forums—now known as *Community Child Care Conversations*. These gatherings served as a vital platform for child care providers to engage directly with DCYF leadership and staff, fostering open dialogue, sharing experiences, and shaping the future of early learning in Washington.

Thank you for listening to our concerns. I am interested in supporting DCYF as they navigate these challenges!

-- Forum Participant (Survey Respondent)



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A Statewide Effort

DCYF traveled across the state, holding in-person, multilingual events in all of DCYF's regions. Forums were held in **Spokane, Wenatchee, Yakima, Mt. Vernon, Burien, Lakewood, Vancouver, and Olympia**. A virtual event was offered for those who could not attend in person. The forums were provided in English, Spanish, and Somali. Interpretation services were also provided, ensuring that all providers, regardless of language, could participate fully in the conversation. More than **300 providers attended in person**, with an additional **300 participants joining online**—demonstrating the dedication and engagement of Washington's child care community.

These forums provided a space for providers to voice their experiences, ask questions, and contribute to meaningful discussions on the challenges and opportunities within early childhood education (ECE). The conversations covered key themes such as workforce support, licensing processes, subsidy programs, and the evolving needs of child care providers and families.

Looking Ahead

This report captures the key insights, statewide trends, and provider feedback gathered during the forums. It also outlines actionable steps DCYF plans to take in response to the information received, reinforcing our commitment to continuous improvement and collaboration.

A Heartfelt Thank You

DCYF extends its deepest gratitude to everyone who made these forums possible—child care providers, Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC) members, the Provider Supports Subcommittee, and partners in the ECE field. Your feedback and advisement were instrumental in bringing these important events to life. Your voices, dedication, and invaluable insights continue to shape the future of early learning in Washington.

We also appreciate the contributions of the DCYF Community Engagement Team, Licensing and Early Learning Division staff for their support in making these forums a success.

With appreciation,



Nicole Rose

Assistant Secretary, Early Learning



Ruben Reeves

Assistant Secretary, Licensing Division

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2024 Community Child Care Forums - Actionable Steps:

Licensing Division

Licensing Washington Administrative Code (WAC) Interpretation:

Action Needed: Standardize WAC Training

- All Child Care Licensing staff receive WAC training as part of the six-month onboarding training plan.
- WAC Discussions: This is a current internal process. We receive questions regarding WAC interpretation (directly from staff and received by staff from providers and community partners). Licensing Division (LD) created a feedback loop internally to ensure we are:
 - Using any resource we have to interpret WAC (WAC Q & A, Licensing Guidebook) and/or
 - Reach consensus and develop responses (WAC Discussion Points) shared with licensing teams.
- Internal Review Committee: Leadership, Area Administrators, Supervisors, and Licensors. This group meets weekly to review Inspection Report disputes and unapproved waiver variance requests. It is a rotational (quarterly) duty. Additionally, Supervisors and Licensors involved in the specific dispute attend related discussions. The group discusses WAC interpretations and confirms appropriate WACs were cited. Some of these discussion topics are added to the above WAC Discussion Points.
- WAC FAQ webpage: [WAC 110-300 FAQs | Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families](#). The staff reviews this to ensure they regulate and interpret WAC accurately and consistently statewide.

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- Child Care and Early Learning Licensing Guidebook: [Publications Library | Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families](#). This tool is used by licensing staff and our provider communities as a framework and support with successful implementation of licensing standards (WAC). The guide provides explanations of the “why” of selected standards and shared examples, tools, and resources for reference.
- Compliance Flexibility: Collaborative Compliance and Strength-based approach: Collaborative Compliance is the Licensing Division-wide concept that promotes collaboration, encourages innovation, and empowers providers as experts. This allows us to tailor our WAC compliance to the unique needs of children, youth, families, and providers. The four key principles of Collaborative Compliance are:
 1. Establishing flexible pathways to compliance
 2. Demonstrating knowledge and application
 3. Fostering a provider-centered approach
 4. Embracing critical thinking and perspective

A strength-based approach has been part of DCYF Child Care Licensing practice since 2019. Staff have received training on this concept for six years (previously titled Strength-based Approach to Presumed Compliance). A strength-based approach reduces bias, promotes consistency, and builds trust with our providers, partners, and community. This allows our providers to feel empowered by building mutual respect; it includes recognizing the strengths of those we work with, fostering an understanding of the purpose and intent of the rules, honoring cultural differences, and engaging others in discussion.

- Standardization of WAC: The Rule-Making process (including review and public comment options) and Negotiated Rule-making (NRM) are two ways DCYF actively standardizes WAC. Through communications via the ECE Newsletter and ongoing regular communications to tribal partners, child care, and early learning providers, we share information on upcoming WAC changes, updates, the rule-making process, and how to subscribe to updates and participate. This includes the option for the public to

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submit their own recommendations for WAC changes.

- Participate in Rule Making, subscribe to receive notices, and offer comments on DCYF’s Rule Making web page: [Participate in Rule Making | Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families](#)
- Find current information on Rule filings at [Rule Filings | Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families](#)

NRM is a way to develop rules by seeking consensus from delegates representing groupings of similar parties impacted by the rule. Utilizing the NRM approach to rulemaking has several benefits, such as providing greater public access to rulemaking, creating more culturally and developmentally appropriate rules and a better understanding of rule intent, and increased compliance with rules.

- Clear and Consistent Communication: All external communications are shared with licensing staff before release. WAC consistency will be discussed at each region-specific 2025 Community Child Care Conversation. This will occur during Q&A or as an agenda-specific topic and will help clarify specific WACs identified by providers. We will review data on frequently cited rules to provide Technical Assistance so providers will better understand how to reach compliance.

Improve Relationship with DCYF:

Action Needed: Streamline staff talking points, develop bilingual strategies, hire outreach representatives, and continue planning/hosting forums.

- This is a continued collaboration through:
 - Collaborative Compliance and Strength-based approach (see above)
 - Community Child Care Conversations into 2025 and beyond. 2025 Community Child Care Conversations (Forums) are being designed around 2024 Forum themes and feedback received. Themes from the report will be addressed and discussed at regional sessions.

Original Date: March 31, 2025 | Revised Date:
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- LD participates in continued meetings and conversations with the Indian Policy Early Learning (IPEL) Committee, SEIU 925, Voices of Tomorrow, Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC), Provider Supports, Washington Childcare Centers Association (WCCA), etc., resulting in information sharing, action steps, and feedback loops. Some of the ongoing efforts include:
 - Streamlined staff talking points, for example, - Capacity Waivers (licensor outreach calls, ongoing), Child Care Monitor Visit Survey.
 - Development of bilingual strategies – Utilize the DCYF Language Access Program team, hire multilingual licensing staff, capture language access data in our systems.
 - Continued planning/hosting forums (done, in the process).
- Licensor response time is listed in their job expectations (three business days).
- LD continues working with Voices of Tomorrow to develop a culturally competent training approach for our East African provider communities. We hope this framework becomes a model for additional culturally competent training approaches as well.

Insurance Costs

Action Needed: Meet with Insurance Commissioner

- Rising costs tied to licensing reviews:
 - Emily Arneson, DCYF Legal Administrator, is currently meeting with provider groups and the Insurance Commissioner, gathering information, and supporting providers in planning the next steps.

Licensing Visits/Monitoring Visits

Action Needed: Improve communication around federal requirements:

- ELAC/Provider Supports (and NRM) understand federal (CCDF) requirements and rules LD must follow. We are working on plans for sharing the the federal requirements and how Washington state must meet those requirements. This topic will be addressed during Conversations if it meets the needs of providers. The federal requirements for monitor visits are available on our external DCYF website [Child Care Licensing Policies](#)

Original Date: March 31, 2025 | Revised Date:

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Procedures and Tasks see 10.1.8 Conducting Child Care Monitoring Visits.

- LD will continue to lean into our DCYF Language Access Program and Voices of Tomorrow community partners for support and consultation.
- Monitor Visit Surveys – We will highlight what we are doing well, continuance of practice, and provide areas for improvement.
- Cultural Competency – The DCYF LD Quality Assurance/Continuous Quality Improvement (QA/CQI) team has initially focused on LD’s cultural competency and responsiveness to the East African provider community. From summer to fall 2024, they gathered information through provider outreach and interviews, and have been analyzing data for practice improvement recommendations. This information will inform licensing field practice and an ongoing partnership with the East African provider community.
- Raising awareness with licensing staff - Over the past six years, Child Care Licensing trained on our Presumed Compliance, Strength-Based Approach, which is informing an agency-wide Collaborative Compliance-Strength based approach (see definition above).

Capacity Waiver (13+ rule)

- LD continually informs providers/partners of the upcoming changes.

Current capacity waiver programs receive direct communication (emails) from licensing Area Administrators to review timelines, requirements, and processes. February-March 2025

[Capacity Waiver Webinar Apology](#) (Jan. 24, 2025)

[Save the Date: Family Home Child Care Capacity Waiver Info Meeting Reminder](#) (Jan. 16, 2025)

[Save the Date: Family Home Child Care Capacity Waiver Info Meeting](#) (Dec. 23, 2024)

[Changes to Capacity Waiver Process](#) (Nov. 14, 2024)

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Current capacity waiver programs received personal phone calls from licensing staff to review timelines, requirements, and processes. (September-October 2024)

[Licensed Child Care WAC Updates](#) (May 30, 2024)

[Family Home Capacity Waiver Update](#) (May 23, 2024)

- LD continues to meet with those impacted.
- LD conducts ongoing communication and provides Technical Assistance. LD hosted a capacity waiver webinar in March 2025 for current capacity waiver holders. Additional communications and a Q&A document will be sent state-wide to support those impacted by the transition.
- [Capacity Waivers for Family Home Child Care Providers](#) (https://dcyf.wa.gov/publications-library/LIC_0063) is an informational DCYF publication available in English, Somali, Spanish, and 15 additional languages.
- Created a webpage: [Licensed Family Home Capacity Waivers | Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families](#).
- This topic will be featured in each Community Child Care Conversation in 2025.

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Early Learning Division

We appreciate the time providers dedicated to sharing their experiences at the Child Care Community Forums. Your feedback and guidance is invaluable and your dedication to serving the children and families of Washington does not go unnoticed.

We have addressed the top themes related to the Early Learning Division below. Please note that many of the items identified require funding from the Legislature. We have noted those items with an asterisk (*). Thank you for all you do everyday!

Child Care Subsidy

Action Needed: Increase rates, move to enrollment-based pay, and shorten approval timeline.

- Follow established processes to request funding to increase subsidy rates.*
- Submitted requests for funding to implement enrollment-based and prospective payment for Working Connections Child Care in summer 2026.*
- Train more staff to facilitate quicker referrals for the special needs rate process. DCYF is also exploring policy options related to special needs.

Support for Complex Needs

Action Needed: Provide additional support through grants or training to provide the necessary care and resources for children with complex needs.

- DCYF contracts with the Haring Center at University of Washington to provide Complex Needs training at no cost to providers. DCYF plans to continue this support.*
- Continue to provide annual Complex Needs Award opportunities.*

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- Leverage contracted partnerships to support additional training resources and promote opportunities as identified.

Grants

Action Needed: Many providers are interested in learning about available grant options and understanding the application process. Resources are needed to help navigate the DCYF application process. Ongoing discussions around subcontractors and ensuring access to grants, particularly the ECEAP Complex Needs Fund, and why subcontractors cannot work directly with the state.

- Grant and funding opportunities are, and will continue to be, promoted to providers through direct emails and in the Early Care and Education newsletter.
- The 2025 Child Care Complex Needs Fund opportunity has been updated to include licensed ECEAP subcontractors.
- For 2026:
 - Review and update current resources and technical assistance supports. This includes updated ECEAP Complex Needs Fund resources.
 - Develop plain-talk resources focused on identifying funding opportunities in WA Compass and helpful tips to apply.
 - Host webinars for providers to learn about navigating the grant application processes in DCYF systems.

Staff Qualifications

Action Needed: Extend the timeline for meeting education requirements and provide clearer information about pathways for meeting qualifications.

- There is currently legislation that includes extending the timeline for meeting education requirements.

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- The Early Learning Division will host monthly Office Hours for Child Care Licensors related to Staff Qualifications to ensure that all have consistent and accurate information to share with providers.
- The Early Learning Division in partnership with the Licensing Division:
 - Will host quarterly webinars for providers to share updates and answer questions about staff qualifications starting in 2025.
 - Develop a series of one-pagers to guide providers on their role-specific pathway to meet education/training qualifications. These will be available in spring of 2025.

Training

Action Needed: Improved access to and information about available training programs, and information about the process of becoming a state-approved trainer.

- The Early Learning Division in partnership with the Licensing Division:
 - Will update the professional development webpages to make the information about available training programs easier to locate.
- Promote available training opportunities in the monthly Early Care and Education newsletter.
- Collaborate with trusted partners who are connected to their respective communities to assist in promoting available training opportunities.
- Develop a one-pager to detail the process of becoming a state-approved trainer.

MERIT

Action Needed: Improve issues with system usability and access to records.

- Continue to address usability challenges through MERIT updates.
- Create a MERIT orientation and user guide.
- Create tutorials that show users how to accomplish most common actions – verify education, end date employment, look for training, etc.

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