

**OVERALL SUMMARY REPORT  
PDG QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS FOR ALL NEEDS ASSESSMENT COMMUNITY OUTREACH  
DECEMBER 23, 2019**

**Introduction**

The work to create a statewide early learning needs assessment included two methods of collecting data about needs, gaps and current services for children and families: collection of existing quantitative data from a wide variety of sources, and outreach to parents, caregivers, providers and other professionals to collect their qualitative stories about how they care for children, the services they access, and the gaps in the existing array of services and supports. This document provides a summary of the outreach conducted in September and October in 2019.

There were several different types of outreach conducted.

- Meetings with Established Groups – The Department of Children, Youth and Families met with approximately twenty early learning groups or organizations who meet regularly. They were willing to devote a portion of their meetings to discussing questions about the current early learning system and the strengths, gaps and needs in that system. Approximately 530 people participated in the meetings
- Community Meetings – Washington Communities for Children (WCFC) supports ten regions across the state that convene individuals and organizations within that region to work collaboratively on issues related to the early learning system. Nine of the regions conducted outreach meetings with groups that included parents, caregivers, early learning professionals, and others who work with children. The groups were asked what services they access, what would make it easier to support the development and health of their children, and their hopes and dreams for the early learning system. Approximately 80 meetings were conducted, with nearly 1,000 participants.
- Review of Previous King County Outreach Reports and Summaries – In the past several years the King County region conducted different types of outreach and data analysis to assess the early learning strengths, needs and gaps. Those reports and documents were reviewed for this analysis
- Online Survey – An online survey was posted on the DCYF web page asking similar questions to those posed in the community meetings. Nearly 700 individuals responded to the survey.

Every comment from every participant was reviewed and “coded” based on the five elements in the Strategic Organizing Framework. This framework was developed in collaboration with the project Steering Committee. The Framework will be used as the organizing structure

for the Needs Assessment and the development of a statewide Strategic Plan. The five elements in the Strategic Organizing Framework include the following:

- Empowered Communities and Responsive Early Learning System
- Healthy Children and Families
- Positive Early Learning Experiences
- Strong and Stable Families
- Supported Early Learning Workforce

In addition, some comments from participants were coded as “Cross-Cutting” because they reflected overarching themes that transcend any of the five Framework categories (i.e. access, affordability, equity, language, rural and remote communities, etc.).

For each of the five Framework categories, and the Cross-Cutting themes, 10 – 20 specific codes were developed in order to consistently identify the subject of every comment. The codes were developed based on the issues being addressed in the Needs Assessment, and in collaboration with Washington Communities for Children (WCFC).

It's important to note that these results are not representative of a statistically valid sample of opinions, since all groups were self-selected participants. However, given the large volume of comments, and the diversity of those who participated (caregivers and professionals, as well as racial, ethnic and geographic diversity), it does represent an interesting cross-section of viewpoints for consideration.

## Executive Summary

The following provides a high-level summary of the major themes and issues that emerged. They are summarized as either being cross cutting themes that touch on many early learning issues, programs or services, or themes that relate to one of the five elements of the strategic organizing framework.

ELEMENT	THEME/MAJOR ISSUE
1. CROSS CUTTING	ACCESS, AFFORDABILITY, AVAILABILITY
	EQUITY AND COMMUNITIES OF COLOR
	RURAL/REMOTE

### Synopsis

- Access to and affordability and availability of services came up frequently and were often interconnected.
- These challenges played out across a wide range of needs, from childcare to healthcare to housing and other needs.
- Issues of equity, particularly racial equity, were a major theme in the experience of communities of color. Inequities manifest in a multitude of ways both at institutional- or system-level and at program/service-level.
- Communities in rural or remote areas also reported unique challenges with access to the early learning system.
- Strengths noted included: an early learning workforce committed to children, parents and families’ love for and support of their children’s growth, increasing public awareness of the importance of early childhood development, growing conversation about and commitment to equity; and continued improvement of the early learning system in Washington state.

ELEMENT	THEME/MAJOR ISSUE
2. EMPOWERED COMMUNITIES AND RESPONSIVE EARLY LEARNING SYSTEMS	SYSTEM NAVIGATION AND REFERRALS
	COORDINATION
	FINANCING/FUNDING
	OTHER ISSUES

### Synopsis

- System navigation challenges impact both parents/families and providers. Parents and caregivers said they need centralized information about available resources and assistance connecting to and navigating through them, while providers said they need to know what is available in order to make effective referrals and provide assistance.

- There is a need for coordination of services and supports on multiple levels, and the current lack of it manifests in different ways. When coordination is lacking, families must take on greater burdens to navigate and coordinate the services they seek.
- There is a significant need for more financing of the early learning system as a whole, especially to address the complex multifaceted funding gap for expansion of affordable childcare.
- Strengths noted included: strong coordination at the local level in some locales, greater alignment in standards, the work of regional coalitions, increased awareness of early learning among policy makers, and increased parent engagement in advocacy.

ELEMENT	THEME/MAJOR ISSUE
3. HEALTHY CHILDREN AND FAMILIES	COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH CARE
	HEALTH CARE COVERAGE
	MENTAL HEALTH – FAMILY & KIDS

**Synopsis**

- Many participants expressed a need for all children to have comprehensive health care, ideally with a medical home and coordination of care across providers.
- Many families need access to free or affordable health care coverage and assistance securing it.
- Ensuring proper health care and nutrition were frequently mentioned by parents as ways they support their children’s growth and development.
- Within health care, mental health services (for children and adults) were the most significant and most frequently reported need/issue/gap.
- Children without adequate mental health supports in turn impacts childcare and early learning providers, who bear an additional burden of trying to address mental health needs when children are in their care.
- Strengths noted included: the breadth and depth of actions that parents take to support their children’s growth, increased understanding about early learning by providers in related professions, and increasing integration of mental health supports in general healthcare.

ELEMENT	THEME/MAJOR ISSUE
4. POSITIVE EARLY LEARNING EXPERIENCES	CHILDCARE
	INFORMAL ACTIVITIES
	SPECIAL NEEDS/SPECIAL EDUCATION
	EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS

**Synopsis**

- The top issue that emerged during this outreach across all participants was the need for quality affordable childcare for all children. However, provision of private childcare comes with a huge cost gap that deeply impacts both families and childcare providers .
- Parents and caregivers reported that engaging their child(ren) in activities outside of childcare or school is a major way they support their childrens’ development. They participate in a wide range of activities both at home and out in the community.
- Parents, caregivers and providers said that children with special needs require additional supports that are missing in many parts of the system. Challenges include general lack of programs and services (e.g. long wait lists), lack of providers with specific knowledge/need for specific training, coordination and integration across providers, health care that doesn’t include coverage or has limited coverage for specific needed services, and teacher/student ratios that don’t accommodate extra time needed for working with special needs children.
- A number of existing early learning programs, including ECEAP, Head Start, ECLIPSE and ESIT, were frequently cited as resources that children and families depend on, but many participants reported difficulties accessing these programs due to long wait lists.
- An issue that cuts across pre-K, K-12 systems is the need for more seamless transitions among them.
- Strengths noted included: the strong commitment to children and families on the part of many providers and organizations especially those going above and beyond with limited resources; the array of community-based informal activities for children and families in some locales; public programs that are highly utilized such as Head Start, ECEAP, Play and Learn groups, and Home Visiting.

ELEMENT	THEME/MAJOR ISSUE
5. STRONG, STABLE, NURTURING AND SUPPORTED FAMILIES	FAMILY ECONOMIC & BASIC NEEDS
	FAMILY STABILITY
	PARENTS & CAREGIVERS

**Synopsis**

- The most prevalent challenge families reported was addressing their financial needs. Some families struggle just to meet basic needs for housing, food and transportation.
- The struggle to meet basic needs means that the cost of childcare becomes an additional and often overwhelming cost burden, resulting in families having to make difficult choices between jobs/income and childcare.
- When families are forced to focus so much on basic needs, there can be an impact on family mental health and in turn, on child(ren)’s development.

- Parents bring both a wealth of knowledge and commitment to supporting their child(ren)’s growth. They shared a wide range of approaches they take, from ensuring health of their child to supporting their social emotional development to engaging with providers.
- At the same time, most parents also wish to gain more parenting knowledge, both informally by connecting with other parents and formally through classes. Social connection, especially with other parents, is a major source of support and peer learning.
- Many parents reported their reliance on family, friends and neighbors to provide care for their children. Some parents said they couldn’t afford or access childcare, while others preferred care to be provided by family members.
- Parents bring a lot of resilience to supporting their children and families, especially when faced with major challenges and family stressors. But they also need supports to bolster their resilience.
- Strengths noted included: the strength and resilience of parents; the family support provided by kinship caregivers; community resources to meet families’ basic needs like WIC, food banks, and health care providers, as well as early learning organizations, agencies and coalitions.

ELEMENT	THEME/MAJOR ISSUE
6. SUPPORTED EARLY LEARNING WORKFORCE	COST OF DOING BUSINESS
	PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING
	STAFF RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION/COMPENSATION

**Synopsis**

- As described in a previous section, access to affordable quality childcare is the top need/gap participants identified. Many participants see the underlying cause of that is the substantial gap between the cost of providing childcare and the availability of funding to support families who need childcare services.
- Many providers described a significant need and desire for ongoing professional development and training for staff working in both early learning and related professions and sectors.
- In particular, training is needed to expand provider knowledge in several specific areas: working with special needs children, trauma-informed practices; cultural competence; technology; and available resources so that providers can refer children and families to supports that meet their needs.
- The multifaceted funding challenges described in earlier sections, including the low levels of compensation for staff, have a substantial bearing on childcare providers’ ability to attract, hire and retain staff.
- Strengths noted included: caring and committed childcare providers and staff; existing professional development and training resources; efforts to create ongoing improvement in rules and regulations; and support from Early Achievers coaches.

### DETAILED SUMMARY

The following provides descriptions of the major themes and issues that emerged from each of the five elements of the framework, as well as overarching (or cross cutting) themes that were raised by participants. The following provides data on the number of comments received about a topic, as well as a sample of quotes from participants.

### CROSS CUTTING THEMES/MAJOR ISSUES

The themes described in this section were ones that cut across the other five elements that follow.

THEME/MAJOR ISSUE	RELATED SUB-ISSUES	CODE COUNT
<b>ACCESS, AFFORDABILITY, AVAILABILITY</b>	ACCESS	528
	AFFORDABILITY	725
	AVAILABILITY	434
<p><b>Synopsis</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to and affordability and availability of services came up frequently and were often interconnected.</li> <li>• These challenges played out across a wide range of needs, from childcare to healthcare to housing and other needs.</li> <li>• The challenges were also amplified for certain families, including those in rural and remote areas, those with language and culturally-specific needs, and those with children with special needs.</li> <li>• Access included issues of physical accessibility, wait lists or wait times, and eligibility for certain services.</li> <li>• Affordability included issues of cost for low income families as well as higher income families who don't qualify for subsidies but are challenged to pay privately for services.</li> <li>• Availability included issues of inadequate supply for certain services (especially for those with special needs), in remote areas, and flexible/available hours to meet family work schedules for childcare.</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Selected Quotes</b></p> <p><i><b>“The needs of the community are greater than what providers can offer...high quality childcare and preschools are full. There are waiting lists of two years or more for highly desired childcare options....ECEAP are [sic] only serving half of those who qualify. Plus, income levels for qualifying for ECEAP is so low it leaves a huge gap of children who do not qualify...and cannot afford preschool.”</b></i></p> <p><i><b>“Money. Always money. The ‘best’ schools cost too much....Providers do not get paid enough. The person fixing your toilet gets \$25+ an hour, but the person raising your kid barely gets a living wage....It's a mess.”</b></i></p>		

*“Cost of care is huge...we were paying more than our mortgage in child care costs.”*

*“There are so many families with children who have special needs...my son’s ASD [autism spectrum disorder] diagnosis, that’s the one I am most attuned to. Parents who have concerns about their children are having to wait upwards of 12-18 months to get into [sic] for an evaluation, with little to no supports during that wait. There are too few properly trained professionals to help all of the families in need.”*

*“The cost and difficulty in finding quality child care. I have been under-employed since my first child was born 4.5 years ago because I could not find affordable quality childcare. All the centers I called or toured were too expensive, had hundreds-long waiting lists, seemed small and cramped and low quality, and/or did not provide any flexibility whatsoever in offering half-day or part-time childcare.” – a parent on the biggest challenge in meeting their child’s needs*

THEME/MAJOR ISSUE	RELATED SUB-ISSUES	CODE COUNT
EQUITY AND COMMUNITIES OF COLOR	COMMUNITIES OF COLOR	56
	EQUITY	282
	IMMIGRANT/REFUGEE	43
	LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL COMPETENCE	157
	TRIBAL COMMUNITIES	19

**Synopsis**

- Racial inequities experienced by communities of color was a cross-cutting issue raised by participants. It impacts many aspects of the early learning system as a whole and in programs and services. In particular, families with language needs, refugee and immigrants, families with undocumented status, migrant farmworkers and tribal communities, described unique challenges that exacerbated their experience of racial inequities.
- Institutionalized or system-level inequities included the need for greater understanding of and inclusion of cultural differences in system-level definitions/standards/evaluation tools/frameworks (e.g. assessment of child development or kindergarten readiness, parenting and family norms, etc.); and more cultural competence in the development of and content for professional development and training.
- Inequities in programs and services included needs for: valuing multilingualism and multiculturalism instead of viewing it as a deficiency or inferior to dominant white culture; increased cultural competence among providers; responding to family-level or

community-level stressors that disproportionately effect communities of color (e.g. poverty, substance abuse, historic trauma, incarceration); content/subject matter knowledge in both interpretation and translation; eliminating judgment of different parenting and early learning approaches, including supporting parents who wish to connect their children to their culture; unlocking barriers to accessing services for undocumented families; recognizing and responding to the impacts of historic marginalization on specific communities.

- Some of the impact of these inequities on families has been greater challenges accessing services for their children, choosing not to avail themselves of services, misinterpretation or inaccurate assessment of children or families, mistrust or fear of the system.
- In addition to racial inequities, participants also described other inequities: rural areas with unique challenges, income inequities (e.g. working families who don't qualify for subsidies and don't have means to pay for services privately), and pay inequities (e.g. childcare workforce wages sub-par to teachers in K-12 systems).

### **Selected Quotes**

***“What’s also important...is getting away from “all kids” universalism, but with the most vulnerable kids in mind. Otherwise, “all kids in mind” means kids of color are left out again and again and again.”***

***“Latino community members and other immigrant communities [need] access to child care services. It’s not fair that we have to stay at home because there’s no place to leave the children, practically all that we do as parents or neighbors is illegal. It can’t be that 90% of my wage goes towards paying daycare and I don’t qualify for the subsidy. Nobody speaks Spanish and when people want to open a daycare they can’t because it’s too difficult. I would like the situation to improve for everyone. The state has created a crisis that didn’t exist before. My experience living in a country where the government creates problems to solve them themselves tells me that this is going to happen here too.” – a parent when asked about their hopes and dreams for young children in their life or community***

***“Primarily that my son gets a fair shot a life and opportunities despite him being a black child.” – a parent when asked about their hopes and dreams for young children in their life or community***

***“Education that will get them career, housing, and safety (for Muslims, especially Muslim girls).” – a parent when asked about their hopes and dreams for young children in their life or community***

***“Early Learning is a system not created for Black children.” – a parent participant in the Black Family Voices Project in King County***

***“Telling people at an early age – your culture is not as valued. Stifles ability to learn. An emotional block.” – leader of an agency serving refugees and immigrants***

*“I’m also a mom of an 8-yr old and a 6-yr old. They and my family experience the issues we have been discussing every day...children experiencing racism at school, deciding about childcare, we have families who have lost their husbands and having to write quality improvement stuff while also dealing with immigration issues, etc.” – a parent and childcare provider describing challenges*

*“‘Professionalism’, as it is often interpreted, can also be white supremacist and elitist. We should really evaluate how we conceive of professionalism.”*

*“Most of the families that I know, are low income families, which some (or most of them) didn't even finish elementary school in their countries, as a consequence, it is hard for them to become the voice of their children. Another barrier for them to be their children's voice, is the language (a lot of those parents don't speak English.)” –a provider/professional, describing challenges facing families they work with*

*“From my field of work, I see that most of the challenges come from families with agricultural backgrounds. Parents are getting off work late after 5 which is after work hours. Most of these programs aren't open late enough so that parents can come in at a later time and not miss out on work. I also see lots of issues with transporting children to services. Some parents need more education when it comes to riding public transportation.” –a provider/professional, describing challenges facing families they work with*

*“Teachers in public schools are not informed enough about historical trauma and the way it impacts a child's identity in school.” – respondent to tribal early learning survey, when asked if current system meets their child’s needs*

THEME/MAJOR ISSUE	RELATED SUB-ISSUES	CODE COUNT
RURAL/REMOTE	RURAL/REMOTE	146
<p><b>Synopsis</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many participants said that families in rural or remote areas face unique challenges across many issues that impact families’ lives.</li> <li>• Access to and the lack of availability of transportation, housing and childcare providers and other supportive services were described as especially significant challenges.</li> <li>• Some felt that the lack of available resources and fewer choices for families results in lower quality services.</li> </ul>		

- Because our state’s agricultural workers are largely Hispanic immigrants, the challenges also intersect with unique needs of this community.
- Early learning providers/professional in rural areas also face unique needs, especially in access to educational and professional development opportunities and referrals to other family services.

#### **Selected Quotes**

***“Because we live in a small rural area the availability and consistency of some of these resources are not always available or quality. There are limited resources and options to choose from. Parents education is not easily accessible or available without travel.”***

***“In rural areas, barriers include lack of special needs services, parenting support, language barriers, lack of transportation, and with low workforce wages we still cannot affordable limited available housing stock.”***

***“That their generation can overcome the society of drugs, homelessness and all the ills that come with it. Our children are seeing a horrible way of life with little hope. We live in a very rural community, the towns are dying, no businesses, no jobs or the few have little pay and no benefits. So I guess how can the children be given hope when their parents are struggling so hard to encourage hope?” – a participant, when asked about their hopes and dreams for young children in their life or community***

## EMPOWERED COMMUNITIES AND RESPONSIVE EARLY LEARNING SYSTEMS

This element of the Early Learning Strategic Plan framework is about Empowered Communities and Responsive Early Learning Systems. The vision is that: “Communities are partners in helping to create an early learning system that is equity-focused, responsive, coordinated, adequately resourced and builds on the strengths of families and providers – supporting them to help children thrive.”

THEME/MAJOR ISSUE	RELATED SUB-ISSUES	CODE COUNT
<b>SYSTEM NAVIGATION AND REFERRALS</b>	SYSTEM NAVIGATION/RESOURCE REFERRALS	434
	REFERRALS/HELP ME GROW	77
<p><b>Synopsis</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• System navigation challenges impact both parents/families/caregivers and providers.</li> <li>• Parents reported needing centralized information about available resources, whether their family is eligible and how to access them; as well as how to navigate through processes and coordinate among different services and providers.</li> <li>• Facing these obstacles, some parents described choosing not to access resources, including services for which they would be eligible.</li> <li>• These challenges are especially difficult for certain families, including non-custodial parents, single parents, families with language and cultural competence needs, and families new to or unfamiliar with the system.</li> <li>• Providers said they often lack awareness of or information about other resources and eligibility criteria in order to accurately refer their clients. And when referrals are made, they are often not completed. Many suggested there is a need for a coordinated referral and tracking system.</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Selected Quotes</b></p> <p><i>“There are many challenges I know...from my experience working closely with families and providers, but one challenge I often see families go through in our Yakima Valley Community is...navigating the early learning support systems (special services, starting conversation with doctors about child developmental concerns, access to child care, etc.) in a way that they feel understood,</i></p>		

***respected and acknowledged. Because of this, they often chose [sic] to not reach out.” – a provider/professional describing challenges facing families they work with***

***“When everything is so fragmented, it’s a giant time sink. It’s hard to actually be a parent when you’re trying to juggle all these different things. I had the resources to pay but couldn’t find things.” – a parent on challenges in meeting their child’s needs***

***“Even as a professional who is pretty sophisticated at navigating systems, that even when we call DCYF, we also get conflicting information, are asked for different information from the same representative on different days. And we have a lot more experience, and yet still are in this position. This complexity and difficulty translated into barriers not just for families but also for service providers assisting those families.” – a provider/professional describing challenges facing homeless families they work with***

***“As Primary Care Providers who see children as many as 10 times during their first two years of life for routine well child checks, we are in a prime position to share information with our young families. Yet the health care system is such that we have minimal time to be effective in this. Centralized resources/information in multiple languages and/or support in Care Coordination is needed. We need to assure that families are following through and understand the value of programs such as Early Support for Infants and Toddlers...The system is too confusing for us all and we are who the families come to for guidance.” – a provider/professional describing challenges facing families they work with***

***“That families can spend less time going through system after system in order to access services, or completely miss some services because they don't know they exist or are eligible. If we have a coordinated system for linking families to services, they can spend less time navigating multiple systems and more time helping their children grow and thrive.” – a provider when asked about their hopes and dreams for young children in their life or community***

THEME/MAJOR ISSUE	RELATED SUB-ISSUES	CODE COUNT
COORDINATION	COORDINATION	359
	COALITIONS	41
<b>Synopsis</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many commented that work of agencies and providers often seems to be done in silos. There is a need for coordination on multiple levels: across sectors (e.g. childcare, early learning system, schools and health care), among state agencies (i.e. DCYF and</li> </ul>		

OSPI), between local and state-level government agencies, among public agencies and providers, and among local agencies and organizations.

- Participants said that the lack of coordination manifests in multiple ways: varied eligibility criteria for programs, requirements (e.g. for childcare licensing), differences in interpretations of rules and regulations (e.g. acceptance of special needs children), sharing data across agencies
- The lack of coordination among agencies, providers and various support services also impacts families, who then must take on greater burden to navigate and coordinate among providers and services, or experience greater challenges facing inconsistent eligibility criteria or program requirements.

**Selected Quotes**

*“[There are] lots of silos and nobody is talking to each other. Need to think about how to create a system that surrounds and supports people and what are the values behind that?” –a participant, describing challenges facing families*

*“Parents are often left doing the legwork of communicating from one care setting to the next. This is a big barrier for the children getting the care they need.” –a participant, describing challenges facing families*

*“There is not really an Early Learning ‘system.’ It is a collection of a lot of individual programs and services.” –a participant, describing challenges facing families*

THEME/MAJOR ISSUE	RELATED SUB-ISSUES	CODE COUNT
<b>FINANCING/FUNDING</b>	FINANCING/FUNDING	368
<p><b>Synopsis</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There were many comments about the significant need for more financing of the early learning system as a whole.</li> <li>• Participants described the lack of sufficient funding as having impacts on families and providers in a variety of ways, including: insufficient childcare subsidies, lack of support for the costs of operating childcare businesses (wages, licensing and educational requirements, professional development), and the need for additional funding to support needed and valued services, such as ECEAP, Head Start, Home Visiting, etc.</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Selected Quotes</b></p>		

***“Stretched – not enough providers or funding for the needs of how many children need to be served.” –a provider/professional, describing the early learning system in the state***

***“FUNDING, FUNDING, FUNDING. It feels like no matter how much money we have, there's always more we could be doing for our families and our children. (Money still applies for families - raising a child is EXPENSIVE!)” –a provider/professional, describing challenges in the early learning field***

***“Money. .... Money for education especially with increased WAC requirements. Money for staff- \$ to recruit, train and maintain strong employees.” –a provider/professional, describing challenges in the early learning field***

***“Rising childcare costs have made making our rates affordable to any but the upper middle class impossible. We have to keep our rates as high as they are (currently \$2325 a month for a full time infant) in order to support working wages for our staff (most are making \$16-18 an hour). With education requirements coming into place, we will be paying staff with degrees even higher wages, resulting in higher tuition for families yet again. What started as affordable daycare to support local moms who needed to go back to work, has turned into private school education that only the rich white families can afford. I don't see a solution outside of money and other supports from the state. This is not the center we want to be, but we cannot see a way out.” –a provider/professional, describing challenges in the early learning field***

THEME/MAJOR ISSUE	RELATED SUB-ISSUES	CODE COUNT
OTHER ISSUES	INFRASTRUCTURE/DATA	51
	ADVOCACY AND PUBLIC AWARENESS	30
<p><b>Synopsis</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some said there is a general need to continue raising public awareness of and advocating for both early learning (what it is, why it's important) and what families need.</li> <li>Some commented about data: needing comprehensive data, using data effectively to measure progress, and disaggregating data on communities of color and by regions.</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Selected Quotes</b></p>		

***“First we must have awareness! I am recommending a huge public awareness campaign that informs parents and partners about DCYF and our mission/vision! We have great programs and opportunities, but if the public doesn't hear about them, what does it matter?” –a provider/professional, describing challenges in the early learning field***

***“Also, the story told about Early Achievers is different from what's often provided by the state. Data is often not disaggregated. Experience out in the field looks different. Want to make sure what communities of color are experiencing are reflected.” –a provider/professional, describing challenges in the early learning field***

## HEALTHY CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

This element of the Early Learning Strategic Plan framework is about Healthy Children and Families. The vision is that: “Children’s overall health and well-being are central to their development; responsive systems of care exist to ensure they have access to comprehensive and integrated health care (physical, mental and oral health), developmental screening, and key social and emotional supports.”

THEME/MAJOR ISSUE	RELATED SUB-ISSUES	CODE COUNT
<b>COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH CARE</b>	COMPREHENSIVE CARE	91
	PHYSICAL HEALTH CARE	434
	ORAL HEALTH	80
	MATERNAL HEALTH	50
<p><b>Synopsis</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many parents and caregivers mentioned the reliance they have in their children’s health care provider.</li> <li>• Some parents and caregivers said that children need comprehensive health care, ideally with a medical home and coordination of care across providers.</li> <li>• Parents frequently reported that they support their children’s growth and development by ensuring their children’s health needs are met, including physical, mental and oral and nutritional health.</li> <li>• Within health care, mental health services (for children and adults) was the most significant and frequently reported need/issue/gap.</li> <li>• Participants shared both positive and negative experiences with health care providers. Many had experiences that were helpful and supportive, while some reported feeling "talked down to," judged, or otherwise disrespected.</li> <li>• Maternal health was often cited as important, with needs for more prenatal and postnatal education, and maternal mental health/post partum depression.</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Selected Quotes</b></p> <p><i>“I support his health 100%. I am on top of his checkups. Both medical and dental. My son is up to date with immunizations. The same with his development at nine months old. I noticed that he was behind in his motor skills and I consulted with his</i></p>		

*pediatrician to have him referred to the proper resources. Soon after he started physical therapy.” -parent participant describing how they support their child’s development*

*“I will focus primarily on the medical home since that is where I work. We need clinics who have appropriate levels of access to care for all families, health care providers who have the knowledge and time/resources to appropriately assess family needs, the ability to connect families to support services in a streamlined and effective way, and efficient bidirectional communication between the medical home and family services.” –a provider/professional, describing what is needed in the early learning field*

THEME/MAJOR ISSUE	RELATED SUB-ISSUES	CODE COUNT
<b>HEALTH CARE COVERAGE</b>	HEALTH CARE COVERAGE	166
<p><b>Synopsis</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some families reported needing access to free or affordable health care coverage.</li> <li>• In particular, there is a lack of coverage for certain needed services: home health, developmental delays, special needs, and therapies.</li> <li>• Families also need help navigating the process of securing coverage/insurance.</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Selected Quotes</b></p> <p><i>“For a lot of our families, this is a huge barrier... Insurances are finding lots of fun ways to get around this. We just had a family decline a visit because older brother needs all the visits.” –a provider/professional, describing challenges facing families they work with</i></p> <p><i>“Children who have special healthcare needs don't have access to care or not to the full resources they need.” –a participant, describing challenges facing families</i></p> <p><i>“Access to healthcare and education is essential at all ages. Within the healthcare and education systems informed referral sources are essential to get children to specialty services, care and special instruction/early intervention when things aren't going right in any area of the child's development.” – a participant when asked about what services or supports are needed for young children in their community</i></p>		

THEME/MAJOR ISSUE	RELATED SUB-ISSUES	CODE COUNT
MENTAL HEALTH – FAMILY & KIDS	MENTAL HEALTH	256
	ACES/TRAUMA/TOXIC STRESS	71
	PARENTAL RISK FACTORS	50

**Synopsis**

- Mental health was the top unmet health care need identified by participants, with multiple related issues.
- Access to and availability of mental health services is a challenge, especially in rural areas, for children with special needs and for infants.
- Children without adequate mental health supports in turn impact childcare and early learning providers, who bear an additional burden of trying to address mental health needs when children are in their care. However, providers don't have the necessary training to provide that care.
- Mental health for children also often goes hand-in-hand with mental health supports for the family. This connection was particularly strong for families that have experienced trauma, such as historical trauma in communities of color, or where parents face life stressors such as substance abuse or involvement with the criminal justice system.
- Some communities of color have cultural stigma and/or misperceptions about mental health that can lead to underutilization of needed services.

**Selected Quotes**

*“I try to be open with my children about our situation and yet I also know they are young and don’t understand why their dad isn’t around right now. My therapist is helping me, and I don’t know what I would do without her.” – a parent on challenges in meeting their child’s needs*

*“Mental health and use of illegal substances are challenges facing families in our community, directly impacting children. Lack of foster homes resulting in children reunified with bio parents who are not ready for the responsibility to successfully care for their children.” –a provider/professional, describing challenges facing families they work with*

*“Families unaware of the trauma and ACEs [adverse childhood experiences] that have impacted their own development and upbringing. The need for parents to have one-on-one support and assistance so they have opportunities to make different parenting choices. This means more infant mental health and pediatric mental health providers and long-term early childhood home visiting programs.” –a provider/professional, describing challenges facing families they work with*

***“I also believe that the stress our families have today from lack of housing, not enough money to cover required expenses, lack of child care and other things are creating unintended trauma on children. We are seeing a trend of extremely challenging behaviors in children that are attending our programs. As well, children coming from families who have drug addictions or other issues such as a parent in jail or prison, parents not providing basic needs for their children, and a lack of parenting skills. Teachers are struggling to meet the needs of these children who do not trust and have trauma. It is very difficult in a classroom of 17 to 20 children when you have 5 to 7 who cannot function in this type of group setting and create safety issues for other children and teachers. This also affects our school districts, who have higher expectations for kindergarten and children are often delayed in social emotional development when entering kindergarten and this creates a setback for learning academic skills.” –a provider/professional, describing challenges facing families they work with***

### POSITIVE EARLY LEARNING EXPERIENCES

This element of the Early Learning Strategic Plan framework is about Positive Early Learning Experiences. The vision is that: “Every child has access to safe, engaging and positive early learning experiences that promote school readiness and lifetime success; families are valued as the most important partners in children’s early experiences.”

THEME/MAJOR ISSUE	RELATED SUB-ISSUES	CODE COUNT
<b>CHILDCARE</b>	LICENSED CHILDCARE	726
	NON-LICENSED CHILDCARE	640
	EARLY ACHIEVERS	86
	FACILITIES	84
<p><b>Synopsis</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One of the issues most frequently raised across all outreach participants was the need for quality affordable childcare for all children.</li> <li>• Participants noted that the provision of private childcare is very costly to purchase and to operate, which deeply impacts both childcare providers and families.</li> <li>• Childcare providers reported facing multiple costs including licensing requirements and regulations that change over time; educational requirements and training for staff; additional time and supports needed for children with special needs; student/teacher ratio requirements; minimum wage requirements for staff, and facilities space, materials and supplies. At the same time, participants said that low reimbursement rates for child care subsidies do not cover costs, exacerbating the funding gap and causing some providers to close over time, leading to a reduction in the supply of childcare services.</li> <li>• For childcare, many families said they are faced with challenges regarding both availability and affordability. In particular, working families who don’t qualify for subsidies, yet don’t have the means to pay out of pocket for childcare services, face a significant, and for some insurmountable, cost burden. Parents sometimes make choices to forego jobs and careers in order to qualify for subsidies or to stay home to care for their child(ren).</li> <li>• In addition to cost, lack of flexible childcare open hours means many families juggling non-traditional work schedules (such as shift workers or migrant farmworkers) cannot access care.</li> <li>• Families with special needs children reported having more difficulty finding childcare because fewer providers are willing to accept their children.</li> </ul>		

- Participants said that all of these challenges are amplified for families and providers in rural areas, where families face less choice and greater transportation challenges, and providers must hire staff from a smaller labor pool with less choice in qualifications and education.
- The challenges and lack of quality licensed childcare effected the comments about non-licensed and informal care. Some families who need childcare have to choose unlicensed care when they can't access licensed care, with some concerns expressed about the quality of unlicensed care. Families also often must tap informal care from family members, friends or neighbors to get the needed care for their children.
- Among partner entities, Early Achievers was cited as both a a strength (with some providers reporting positive experiences with Early Achievers coaches), and a concern (in terms of stringent requirements)..

#### **Selected Quotes**

***“Biggest gap is lack of childcare in the state. Parents can’t find childcare.” –a participant, describing challenges facing families***

***“Families challenged in finding a provider when child may not come every time. Leads to seeing instances when moms have their toddlers in their cars because feel safer than leaving them at home, and that’s when CPS gets called. Yet people are trying the hardest to make it work. System isn’t set up for the kind of hours that families work.” –a participant, describing challenges facing families***

***“We need more quality childcare and childcare providers BADLY. The barriers to this are mainly class and income related - not just to the families seeking care, but to the providers who have to pay endlessly out of pocket to even start their first day. Background checks have been taking up to three months to clear...state pay is often late and doesn't follow our programs payment schedule...and something as simple as having the money to buy a birth certificate are preventing the most vulnerable kids from receiving even the most basic of services.” –a provider/professional, describing challenges facing families they work with***

***“Sometimes increasing quality has led to less available childcare, which leads to more child abuse because children [sic] being left with people who are unsafe. There are connections between quality and access and available choices for families.” –a participant, describing challenges facing families***

***“Child care is open 8-5, and that’s when people are working, especially dads. Schools open at 8 and are done at 3. How do we go to talk to somebody about our kid? How do we access resources when the people giving them aren’t available?” – a parent on challenges in meeting their child’s needs***

THEME/MAJOR ISSUE	RELATED SUB-ISSUES	CODE COUNT
INFORMAL ACTIVITIES	INFORMAL ACTIVITIES	686
	PLAY AND LEARN	112
<p><b>Synopsis</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many parents and caregivers said that engaging their child(ren) in activities outside of school is an important way of supporting their childrens’ development. They participate in a wide range of activities both at home and out in the community. The latter include parks, libraries, play groups, community centers, church, museum, pool, cultural places, art or dance classes, YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs and many more.</li> <li>• Many participants reported that availability of and access to these resources is essential for families, but some communities, such as rural and/or impoverished have comparatively fewer resources/options.</li> <li>• In particular, many parents noted Play and Learn groups as a useful resource for both their children and for them as parents to connect with other parents.</li> <li>• Some parents expressed a desire for help identifying resources and opportunities for community-based informal activities.</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Selected Quotes</b></p> <p><i>“Free, indoor places for families to connect and learn. Play to Learn is huge in our community, as are drop in play groups at churches and senior centers. Children learn through play and parents learn from other parents. Educational materials in non-English languages - BEYOND SPANISH!” – a participant when asked about what services or supports are needed for young children in their community</i></p> <p><i>“Library is a ‘yes’ place for kids in [sic] world of ‘no’”. -a participant, describing supports for child development</i></p> <p><i>“Access to playgrounds, play structures and play facilities is important for my son's growth and development. My community only has one play structure within close proximity to our home. I would like to see closer play areas. It would also be great to have other facilities for child play in my neighborhood other than one athletic club. Lastly, I would want to find child playgroups or clubs for two and three-year-olds. I found that most programs won't take my son until he is three and four years old.” – a parent when asked about what services or supports are needed for young children in their community</i></p>		

THEME/MAJOR ISSUE	RELATED SUB-ISSUES	CODE COUNT
<b>SPECIAL NEEDS/SPECIAL EDUCATION</b>	BEHAVIORAL CHALLENGES	76
	DEVELOPMENTAL SCREENING	87
	DEVELOPMENTAL PRESCHOOL	91
	SPECIAL EDUCATION/SPECIAL NEEDS	239

**Synopsis**

- Many parents, caregivers and providers said that children with special needs require additional supports that are missing in many parts of the system. Challenges include general lack of programs and services (e.g. long wait lists), lack of providers with specific knowledge/need for specific training, coordination and integration across providers, healthcare that doesn't include coverage or has limited coverage for specific needed services, and teacher/student ratios that don't accommodate extra time needed for working with special needs children.
- Some participants reported that school districts can vary greatly in how they interpret policies for accepting children with special needs, while childcare centers can similarly be hesitant to accept special needs children because of the additional care/cost/time required.
- Parents and providers expressed a need for more information and knowledge about how best to support children with special needs. And some parents expressed a desire to have supports and services be provided without a judgmental tone.
- More broadly, some participants said that supports for children with behavioral challenges are also lacking – provider knowledge, needs for training, and the knowledge/capacity/skills to understand the connection between behavior and family trauma or other origin issues. Participants also shared that sometimes culturally-specific behavior can be misinterpreted as behavioral challenges.
- Many participants voiced a need for developmental screening to take place earlier in a child's life, with less or no wait times, and be more widespread. They also identified a need after screening for providers to make appropriate referrals and share relevant information with parents. Some participants shared a need to examine the cultural appropriateness of developmental screenings.

### **Selected Quotes**

***“I have a dream that little boys and girls with disabilities and the little boys and girls without disabilities will grow up together and learn in the same rooms of their local school.”***

***“IEP meetings are also very difficult to manage with finding childcare, affording that care, or taking children with me causing the IEP teams to struggle to focus. I have 3 children with IEPs.” – a participant when asked about their hopes and dreams for young children in their life or community***

***“I would like to receive more education about the kids with special needs to be able to help them. I can have more training on what is needed for those kids and be able to help the parents with their kids.” –a provider/professional, describing what is needed in the early learning field***

***“I find that children with behavioral difficulties that could benefit from these programs don't always qualify. We, as a community, are missing opportunities to help children at a young age that struggle with behaviors but are developmentally on track in other areas. There needs to be more services for young children with behavior or mental health challenges.” –a provider/professional, describing what is needed in the early learning field***

***“Training for the EL [early learning] teachers – regarding Refugees/ immigrants. There should be more than a main goal of learning English but also learning cultural competency. More work on how to develop a cross cultural competency so people are prepared for the range of issues for children whose home language is not English. Misinterpreting behavior... can lead to label behavior issues that are not accurate.” –a provider/professional, describing what is needed in the early learning field***

***“The biggest gap is in mental health and behavioral health support for families with young children.” –a provider/professional, describing challenges in the early learning field***

***“There are so many behavioral challenges with children right now that providers have not been trained to handle nor do they have the resources to learn what to do when they need help.” –a provider/professional, describing challenges in the early learning field***

***“Black parents with children who are special needs are not getting access to early intervention in this area. Black families are like at the bottom for getting connected to these resources.” –a participant, describing challenges facing families.***

THEME/MAJOR ISSUE	RELATED SUB-ISSUES	CODE COUNT
EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS	ECEAP	119
	ECLIPSE	42
	ESIT	73
	HEAD START	158
	HOME VISITING	104

**Synopsis**

- Key early learning programs including ECEAP, Head Start, ECLIPSE and ESIT, were frequently cited as being valuable assets for children and families, and that there is a need to expand those resources.
- Many participants reported difficulties accessing these programs due to long wait lists, particularly for ECEAP and Head Start.
- Some providers described a need for greater family awareness of ECLIPSE and ESIT and coordination between childcare providers and health care providers in implementing these programs.
- Some parents and providers also expressed a desire to see ESIT go beyond 3 years of age.
- Home visiting was seen as a helpful resource for parents and caregivers.
- Across all these programs, some participants identified a need for greater cultural competence, especially in ECEAP, Head Start and home visiting, given the larger number of families participating in these programs.

**Selected Quotes**

*“Barriers for migrant families – access to Head Start and ECEAP. They have waiting lists that migrant families can’t access.” –a participant, describing challenges facing families*

*“Families who are enrolled in ESIT face a transition and limited support for their child's developmental needs after they turn 3.” –a participant, describing challenges facing families*

*“There are many children who can’t access early intervention services because 1) services don’t exist or 2) people don’t know about services.” –a participant, describing challenges facing families*

*“Incredibly strong Home Visiting system. But there’s also an opportunity with State dollars for expansion to think about level of evidence needed for community-designed programs, to adapt/shift models to meet their needs. To value evidence in community like evidence from university.”*

THEME/MAJOR ISSUE	RELATED SUB-ISSUES	CODE COUNT
PRE-K, K, K-12 & TRANSITIONS	PRESCHOOL/PREK	166
	KINDERGARTEN READINESS/WAKIDS	77
	K-12 SYSTEM	277
	SEAMLESS TRANSITIONS	55

**Synopsis**

- Some participants cited an issue that cuts across pre-K and K-12 systems – the need for more seamless transitions between early learning programs and the K-12 school system.
- Parents and caregivers who use Pre-K programs expressed support for those services. Pre-K issues mentioned include a desire for universal services, free access and all-day pre-K. Some participants also expressed interest in outdoor preschool.
- Issues related to kindergarten readiness included thoughts about how both parents and providers can help children be ready for kindergarten. Conversely, some also shared concern with the concept of kindergarten readiness and whether it was too focused on academic achievement and standards-oriented. Some participants questioned the cultural relevance of the WAKIDS assessment tool and whether early learning approaches in general take cultural differences into account.
- Many parents shared how they are involved in preparing their children for kindergarten, even as they also sometimes need information and support on how best to do so.
- Issues raised that were connected to the K-12 system included a need for more emphasis on whole child development and social emotional learning, and the need for more before and after school programs. Many families also find it challenging to manage school and parent work schedules.
- Overall it was reported that there are fewer options and resources in rural areas, especially for children with special needs.
- Some participants suggested that other important transition points that need improvement include from early intervention to IEPs, from home therapy to programs outside the home, and transitions among different types of services.

**Selected Quotes**

*“In the early learning field, as teachers, we need to have the state see that it is crucial for the children that we serve that we as early learning educators need to meet with kindergarten teachers because it creates a link and allows for the exchange of information as well as the warm handoff to the traditional school setting.” –a provider/professional, describing challenges in the early learning field*

*“Preschool for all would be great, especially to get them ready for full day kindergarten.”*

*“Look at a preschool child moving to a kindergarten. There are problems with the assessment process. Being bilingual is viewed as ‘language disadvantaged.’ Judged. What’s missing is recognition that the child has a capacity for language.” –a provider/professional, describing challenges in the early learning field*

*“Gaps: Using assessment tools that are based on white American norms. WaKIDS (as example of tool based on white American norms). Kids have a difficult [time] learning to read as Native Americans because parents do not read with their children in their early years. English is their second language and more needs to be done to bring native language at an earlier age.” –a participant, describing challenges facing families*

*“Kindergarten readiness is huge. But also wanting the children in a fun, loving environment. Social skills is huge for young children.”*

*“It would have been nice if they would have helped me understand the importance of kindergarten. What do I teach them? What do I need to know?” – a parent on challenges in meeting their child’s needs*

*“My pipe dream is an entire community invested in the whole child from birth to 18. I don’t just want help for my grandson, I want help for all children. I’m a former secretary at the High School and I have watched as we reduced our programs in the arts, P.E., shop, even what used to be Home Economics – these programs were helpful to the whole person, but it’s not valued anymore. We focus on ‘academic’ and forget about the child/adolescent. Our elementary kids are expected to spend too much time in a seat.” – a provider/professional, describing challenges in the early learning field*

*“Transition from Early Intervention (IFSP) to Special Education (IEP) gap. Preparation for families isn't there. They don't know what to expect. Need a better hand off so they don't get lost in the system.” – a provider/professional describing challenges facing families they work with*

### **STRONG, STABLE, NURTURING AND SUPPORTED FAMILIES**

This element of the Early Learning Strategic Plan framework is about Strong, Stable, Nurturing and Supported Families. The vision is that: “Families, including kinship care, extended families and expectant families, have the resources and supports they need to support overall family health and stability, including children’s healthy development/school readiness, well-being, and success.”

<b>THEME/MAJOR ISSUE</b>	<b>RELATED SUB-ISSUES</b>	<b>CODE COUNT</b>
<b>FAMILY ECONOMIC &amp; BASIC NEEDS</b>	FAMILY ECONOMIC NEEDS	457
	POVERTY/FPL/HOUSEHOLD INCOME	96
	FOOD NUTRITION	407
	HOUSING	144
	TRANSPORTATION	137
	WORKING CONNECTIONS	96

**Synopsis**

- The most prevalent challenge families reported was addressing their financial needs. Some families struggle just to meet basic needs for housing, food and transportation.
- Many parents and caregivers reported being attentive to the importance of nutrition in a child’s development. Food insecurity affects many families, especially in food deserts, even as parents recognize the importance of nutrition for their child(ren)’s development and seek additional information and learning about it. Support from Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program was frequently cited not only for food support, but also a broader community resource. Families also use food banks.
- Housing instability – including homelessness – is a major challenge. Lack of affordable housing is especially acute in some urban centers and rural areas. Homelessness leads to a cascade of effects beyond housing, such as families’ ability to access and apply for various services.
- Participants reported that like housing, transportation (both availability and affordability) is particularly challenging in rural areas.
- Some parents and caregivers said that the struggle to meet basic needs means that the cost of childcare becomes an additional and often unreachable cost burden, resulting in families having to choose between jobs/income and childcare.
- Some participants said that child care subsidies contribute to family economic challenges in two ways: for lower income families who qualify, the subsidies are often not enough to cover cost. And families who don’t qualify for the subsidies may not have adequate resources to pay privately.

## **Selected Quotes**

***“Poverty. Many families are often forced to make choices. Paying for childcare or paying for medication? Paying for childcare or paying for food? Paying for childcare or having a place to live? Quality childcare is a challenge for families to find and afford.” –a participant, describing challenges facing families***

***“Being a parent isn’t hard, but sometimes I wish that I made more money every month. Living paycheck to paycheck can be very stressful when something happens, and I have to ask to borrow money from someone.” – a parent on challenges in meeting their child’s needs***

***“Quit building these billion dollar casinos and build homes for people that need it. And if you make a certain income, if you’re just a dollar over – you can’t get any help. How do you expect people to work and survive?” –a participant, describing challenges facing families***

***“Gap between eligible families and those using benefits in King and Pierce County. Need to adjust the eligibility requirements. Have families with both parents working who are living in their cars. Example: a working mom who makes \$18/hr and is above cut-off of \$2,X00 for a family of two – but with paying for rent, childcare, etc – isn’t enough and is living in the parking lot of her employer with a toddler, and she’s doing everything right. We can’t pretend it costs the same thing to live in King County as it does in Yakima.” –a participant, describing challenges facing families***

***“I also see lots of issues with transporting children to services. Some parents need more education when it comes to riding public transportation.” –a participant, describing challenges facing families***

***“Families with immigration issues – there are a lot of kids who also don’t have status and can’t access childcare subsidies so can’t go into programs and parents work so they have nowhere to go.” –a participant, describing challenges facing families***

***“I hope that DCYF will increase state subsidies to a higher level more equal to what a private pay family does. This would help to increase staff pay which would help retention which would then help the children we serve.” –a provider/professional, describing what is needed in the early learning field***

***“It would be helpful if the Washington State assistance that is helping to pay for childcare and other supportive financial resources be available without making the family hit rock bottom in order to be eligible.” –a participant, describing challenges facing families***

*“We have created a no-mans land for the middle income families. They make too much, but not enough.”*

*“Depends on the season. There are times when there is less work and there is not enough food.” – a parent on challenges in meeting their child’s needs*

*“No, especially in the winter it gets hard to pay the rent and buy clothes for my kids.” – a parent on challenges in meeting their child’s needs*

THEME/MAJOR ISSUE	RELATED SUB-ISSUES	CODE COUNT
FAMILIES STABILITY	OVERALL FAMILY STABILITY/FAMILIES IN CRISIS	434
	CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM	51
	BUSINESSES	19
	SINGLE PARENTS	11
	FATHERHOOD	57
	PAID FAMILY LEAVE	26

**Synopsis**

- Many participants described the stability of their family, and the loving interactions they have among family members as a source of great strength and resilience.
- Parents and caregivers said that there is a cumulative stress on families of addressing and trying to balance multiple major challenges: family economic needs, child/childrens’ developmental needs, household tasks, and work.
- When families are forced to focus so much on basic needs, there can be an impact on family mental health and in turn, on child(ren)’s development.
- In the workplace, some parents described the need for more employer support/flexibility for parents with young children, and especially during and after pregnancy. Paid parental leave was cited as a need by some parents.
- Unique challenges related to parenting and family stability are experienced by single parents, non-custodial parents, and fathers.
- Some parents shared fears about losing their children to the child welfare system due to the combination of these challenges. In a few instances, parents reported unwarranted separation of families. At the same time, some participants said the child welfare system needs more foster parents and supports for those parents.

**Selected Quotes**

*“I love how much fun my family and I all have together when we set everything else aside and focus on each other.”*

*“When you’re just starting a job and you don’t have leave and you’re not allowed to bring a sick child to child care. Especially when you’re a single parent ... it’s hard to juggle. Hard to make the choice between staying home with your child or going to work.” – a parent on challenges in meeting their child’s needs*

*“Lack of foster homes resulting in children reunified with bio [sic] parents who are not ready for the responsibility to successful [sic] care for their children.” –a participant, describing challenges facing families*

*“I can’t describe how much stress the gap between work and school hours causes us on a daily basis, and we are extremely privileged with enough money to pay for babysitters and grandparents nearby. Without those, I would not have had a second child and I have absolutely no idea how anyone manages without those supports.” – a parent on challenges in meeting their child’s needs*

*“I was financially worse off at that time, so I accessed WIC, Head Start, preschool, day care, quite a few services ... and I was constantly questioned. It’s a stigma we need to get over. While still statistically most moms are primary caregivers, we need to steer away from making that assumption — that mothers are the primary caregiver or that dads aren’t involved that much.” – a parent on challenges in meeting their child’s needs*

*“The noncustodial parent may have the child equal time, but not be recognized by services like child care and food assistance that they need to provide for the child.” – a parent on challenges in meeting their child’s needs*

THEME/MAJOR ISSUE	RELATED SUB-ISSUES	CODE COUNT
PARENTING AND CAREGIVERS	KNOWLEDGE OF PARENTING AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT	654
	PARENTAL RESILIENCE	329
	KINSHIP CARE	280
	FFN	64

	PARENTAL CHOICE/FAMILY ENGAGEMENT	392
	SOCIAL CONNECTION/ISOLATION	291

**Synopsis**

- Parents and caregivers reported bringing both a wealth of knowledge and commitment to supporting their child(ren)’s growth. They shared a wide range of actions they take, from ensuring health of their child to supporting their social emotional development to engaging with providers.
- At the same time, most parents and caregivers also wish to gain more parenting knowledge, both informally by connecting with other parents and formally through classes. Social connection, especially with other parents, is a major source of support and peer learning, though some parents of color reported choosing not to participate in mainstream parent groups because they felt the groups lacked cultural relevance.
- Parents also want providers and agencies to respect their knowledge of their children, especially parents of color, some of whom have cultural backgrounds, norms and values that they want to honor in raising their child.
- Parents bring a lot of resilience to support their children and families, especially when faced with major challenges. But they also said they need supports to bolster their resilience, including mental health supports, respite care, drop-off child care, and peer/social connections. Faith and spirituality are also important in nurturing family resilience for some cultures.
- A frequently cited source of support for many parents is help from grandparents, other family members, friends and neighbors. For some parents, relying on informal help is out of necessity while for others it is by choice.
- Parents make choices about when and how they engage with others to support their child’s care and growth. Some are constrained by work demands and other commitments. They also choose the mix of home vs. center-based care that is right for their child and family. Some parents choose to stay home and consider it a privilege to do so, while others do so because the cost of care is too high.

**Selected Quotes**

***“I follow 25 different blogs that I get ideas and find information when there are ‘issues’ like potty training and temper tantrums.” - a parent, describing how they support their child’s development***

***“Currently I believe that there is a great lack of supports and resources for parents of children that display needs that are quite often chalked up by the schools as ADHD, and or a behavior issue. Parents don’t have a good hold on digging their feet in and***

***advocating. All too often parents are treated as uneducated and unknowing.” – a parent on challenges in meeting their child’s needs***

***“Less mommy shaming. Sometimes moms are the hardest on each other. Social media, like Facebook and Instagram make it appear that other parents and moms are having an easy time of it. It makes it hard to feel I’m no measuring up.” – a parent on challenges in meeting their child’s needs***

***“I have 3 children with IEPs [individualized education program]. I’m very involved with my children at school and check in with teachers, staff and my children at the school daily. I bring meds to my 1st grader and preschooler every day about noon. Pick my junior up for lunch as he suffers anxiety so bad that he is unable to eat at school so I take him home to eat and then take him back. My 1st grader is without the help he needs by a para [paraeducator] for about 1.5 hours after lunch so I’m requested to stay and help him regulate and work on his reading and spelling. Many issues and beyond....I had to quit my job as a care provider for disabled clients...this made us a 1 income household which has been hard financially. Our family is NOT at risk! Do not use this to make it something it's not. Just trying to be helpful with ideas.” – a parent on challenges in meeting their child’s needs***

***“The military community is very open because we have such diversity. Each family does their own way of parenting, and it seems to be acceptable that there isn’t too much judgement [sic].”***

***“I’m new to this area and finding mom friends has been hard. This leaves me feeling alone.” – a parent on challenges in meeting their child’s needs***

***“Yes, it is a challenging thing for me because I’m an older mommy so all my girlfriends children are so much older and so I need to find somewhere for me to go to get out of the house.” – a parent on challenges in meeting their child’s needs***

### SUPPORTED EARLY LEARNING WORKFORCE

This element of the Early Learning Strategic Plan framework is about a Supported Early Learning Workforce. The vision is that: “Early learning educators and professionals have access to training, supports and compensation necessary to sustain high quality practices and services, and to maintain a strong, stable workforce.”

THEME/MAJOR ISSUE	RELATED SUB-ISSUES	CODE COUNT
<b>COST OF DOING BUSINESS</b>	COST OF DOING BUSINESS	165
	EARLY ACHIEVERS REQUIREMENTS	124
	EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS	151
	LICENSING/WAC/ECEAP STANDARDS	207
	STANDARDS ALIGNMENT	19

**Synopsis**

- As described in a previous section, access to affordable quality childcare is the top need/gap participants identified. Many participants see the underlying cause of that is the substantial gap between the cost of providing childcare and the availability of funding to support families who need child care services.
- Childcare providers reported facing multiple costs in operating their business, including licensing requirements and regulations that change over time; educational requirements and training for staff; additional time and supports needed for children with special needs; student/teacher ratio requirements; minimum wage requirements; materials and supplies; and meeting facility space needs. At the same time, low reimbursement rates for child care subsidies do not cover operating costs. Taken together, participants said that these factors force many providers to either charge higher rates and/or take only higher income families who can pay out of pocket, or to close, exacerbating the lack of supply.
- Minimum wage requirements and a desire to pay staff fairly (and on par with school districts) drive up costs, but pay still remains too low to attract and retain staff.
- Multiple requirements also create cost and time burden that some providers find overwhelming to fulfill. Multiple rounds of updates to Early Achievers, WAC and ECEAP regulations were cited by providers as challenging to keep up with.
- Besides the financial cost of meeting requirements, some providers also expressed concern about the complexity of the licensing process, and inconsistency in its implementation. Providers also described power dynamics in the relationship with licensors who

come to evaluate childcare businesses, and what they experienced as subjectivity or even punitive behavior from licensors. This also may be amplified by language or cultural differences.

- Some providers believe that standards create “cookie cutter” models and are concerned that reduces choices for families. Others view standards and requirements as not effectively taking into account cultural differences in childcare.
- Educational requirements for staff also come with time and cost burden, which can make it harder to retain staff.

#### **Selected Quotes**

***“The biggest challenge for providers is finding skilled staff who will work for low pay. Small centers cannot stay in business with the low rates that state subsidized care pays. It forces us to raise the rates of private clients to make up the difference. The increase is a hardship on working families. I have 30 years experience in ECE [early childhood education] field and a college degree yet I make below poverty wages with no retirement benefits. It is challenging to try to recruit new teachers when they will be paid low wages for a high stress job. The shortage of childcare in our area is a concern to businesses and families. Many providers have left the field because of Early Achievers and WAC changes.” –a provider/professional, describing challenges in the early learning field***

***“Professionalize the field. We are NOT babysitters.” –a provider/professional, describing challenges in the early learning field***

***“Seems disconnected between licensing, Early Achiever’s, and best practices. Does not seem cohesive at times and leads to confusion and frustration.” –a provider/professional, describing challenges in the early learning field***

***“A vital and crucial issue that needs to be tackled is the ability for the state and licensors to create/have partnership relationships with providers so every move/moment/conversation doesn’t feel like an adversarial relationship with the ability to use fear, intimidation and unequal power status ...Our families would be served so much better without licensees consistently feeling under the gun. Instead, if licensors would enter a licensors home more like old work buddies rather than hopped up ICE enforcers so much positive would be available for kids to be in the best care possible.” –a provider/professional, describing challenges in the early learning field***

***“I would change for the licensors to consider that it is a home daycare because when they visit the licensors are very aggressive because we have kids that are newborns and they come asking for papers and we need to supervise the kid at the same time which “makes it stressful.” –a provider/professional, describing challenges in the early learning field***

***“The house visits happen too often and they do not have a reason to come. They are not professional. They intimidate you.” –a provider/professional, describing challenges in the early learning field***

*“We providers feel that the new guidelines are placing too much pressure on us, and they are forcing us to close because people like me who don’t know English feel like we can’t deal with so many changes.” –a provider/professional, describing challenges in the early learning field*

*“My dream for the future is to be able to sensibly meet licensing requirements without dedicating so much time to "keeping up" with the huge changes licensing constantly makes. We want the children in our care to be treated with kindness, compassion and love. Teachers should not feel that the licensor is "out to get them" on something. They should feel comfortable in their setting when she comes.” –a provider/professional, describing challenges in the early learning field*

THEME/MAJOR ISSUE	RELATED SUB-ISSUES	CODE COUNT
<b>PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING</b>	PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING	450
	KNOWLEDGE OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT/SOCIAL EMOTIONAL	138
	TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES	47
	TRAINING/SUPPORTS FOR RELATED PROFESSIONALS	50

**Synopsis**

- Providers expressed a significant need and desire for ongoing professional development and training for staff working in both early learning and related professions and sectors.
- In particular, training is needed to expand provider knowledge in several specific areas: working with special needs children, trauma-informed practices; cultural competence; technology; and available resources so that providers can refer to needed services.
- Many providers described a need for related professionals in the K-12 system and healthcare sector, including pediatricians, to have more knowledge of social emotional development of children and other available early learning services.

- Participants from rural areas cited a lack of available professional development opportunities, especially in-person trainings. There is a need for training at more flexible hours and onsite.

### **Selected Quotes**

***“Biggest challenge is adapting to special needs children, their needs are challenging. Had a student with autism and had to go to Google to get information on how to help this child.” – a provider/professional describing challenges facing families they work with***

***“‘Professionalism’, as it is often interpreted, can also be white supremacist and elitist. We should really evaluate how we conceive of professionalism.” – a provider/professional describing challenges facing families they work with***

***“Those who work with immigrants/refugees in school need better training – they often misinterpret how they interact. For example: Teachers/Personnel who don’t understand the culture and differences in language...the pause is misinterpreted. They assume the child is not [sic] disrespectful. A pause can be for many reasons.” – a provider/professional describing challenges facing families they work with***

***“There are so many families with children who have special needs. There are too few properly trained professionals to help all of the families in need. I just learned today that my sons social/emotional coach at school (who was professionally trained to help children like my son) has been replaced by a paraeducator who took a training over the summer on how to help high anxiety children. There just aren’t enough trained professionals in our schools to help the children adequately.” – a parent on challenges in meeting their child’s needs***

***“We need training, but can't shut down to attend these off-site. If someone could come to our centers and provide things like positive behavior support or mandated reporter training, it would be extremely beneficial.” –a provider/professional, describing challenges in the early learning field***

***“There should be...more work on how to develop a cross cultural competency so people are prepared for the range of issues for children whose home language is not English.” –a provider/professional, describing challenges in the early learning field***

THEME/MAJOR ISSUE	RELATED SUB-ISSUES	CODE COUNT
STAFF RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION	STAFF RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, TURNOVER	115
	COMPENSATION/WAGES	289
	STAFFING CAPACITY	164
	STAFFING LEVELS	111

**Synopsis**

- Parents, caregivers and providers noted the need for strategies to reduce the rate of staff turnover and stabilize the workforce.
- Compensation/wages for childcare staff was cited by both parents and providers as a significant issue that needs to be resolved.
- Many providers said that the comparatively lower wages and educational requirements make it harder to recruit and retain quality staff. Once on the job, staff face stress from the nature of the work, cost and time burden of continuing educational requirements and high cost of living in some areas. This leads to high turnover, creating added cost for the business owner.
- Participants reported that high student/teacher ratios, especially for children with special needs and infants, adds to compassion fatigue, secondary trauma and/or burnout.
- These challenges are compounded in rural areas.

**Selected Quotes**

*“...every time my children get attached to a teacher they leave cause [sic] they pay them \$12 an hour. It needs to be professionalized and people need to be paid like professionals. The same goes for having more training, education for them. If they were paid like the teachers that they are, that would be a good model.” – a parent on challenges in meeting their child’s needs*

*“Biggest challenge is the staffing, it is the challenge we have the most. Now with the WAC minimum education rule, the wages, finding the correct staff, the good ones, the ones that want to be there for the kids is hard.” –a provider/professional, describing challenges in the early learning field*

*“We need our profession to be on the same level as K-12. Financially, professionally, the whole thing. We need compassionate people who want to work with children. People need to be able to see early childhood as a viable career option.” –a provider/professional, describing challenges in the early learning field*

***“The ability to hire high quality teachers is nearly impossible. We need an early learning work force and placing more and more restrictions and qualifications and demands for educations and trainings makes the field too difficult. Our great folks are leaving for careers in health care or the elementary schools, even just as para educators.”***

***“Many more children are presenting with a high need for one-on-one specialized support which cannot be met with high teacher: child ratios.”***

***“There is a lack of candidates within the Early Childhood career path. The newest WAC's detour probable candidates as funding is not readily available for those wanting to attend college, and the amount of expenses the candidate would incur versus wages of the industry.... pushes people toward other career paths.” –a provider/professional, describing challenges in the early learning field***

***“Education requirements can be an impediment. After spending time getting staff educated and trained, they leave and we have to start all over.” –a provider/professional, describing challenges in the early learning field***

***“I want the importance of the profession to be recognized, but more importantly I want the recognition to come with more funding and a more diverse and educated hiring pool.” –a provider/professional, describing challenges in the early learning field***