STATE OF WASHINGTON

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES

1500 Jefferson Street, SE ● P.O. Box 40975 ● Olympia WA 98504-0975

MEMORANDUM

TO: Governor Bob Ferguson and members of the Washington State Legislature

FROM: Tana Senn, Secretary of the Department of Children, Youth, and Families

DATE: 10/1/2025

SUBJECT: Early Care and Education Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan

I am pleased to share the Access and Living Wage Implementation plan. This work is a long time coming and has been built over years of policy solutions, responding to family and community need, and ultimately provides a road-map for all of us to work from if we want to expand access to high-quality and affordable child care.

Early care and education opportunities are essential; for children's healthy development, to prevent further entries into the child welfare or juvenile rehabilitation systems, for parents' ability to work, and for supporting a flourishing Washington state economy. It is the best investment this state can make.

The Plan lays out a 10-year timeline for implementation for Washington State to achieve our north star of affordable access to child care for all families and living wages for providers. This implementation plan serves as the road map to accomplish this.

This plan is organized by 4 overarching goals with recommendations and strategies for each.

- Goal 1: Families have access to affordable, high-quality ECE that meets their needs.
- Goal 2: Support a thriving ECE workforce.
- Goal 3: Leverage data and align systems.
- Goal 4: Adequate facilities for expansion of the ECE system.

I recognize that the submission of this Implementation Plan arrives at a difficult moment in our state as we address resource challenges at the state and federal level. Despite that our commitment to the children, families, and child care providers that we serve is clear, certain, and unwavering. This plan allows for flexibility and nimbleness for phasing and sequencing to move the child care system forward.

The ECE Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan builds on the foundation laid by previous efforts over many decades, including the Early Learning Coordination Plan (ELCP), the Child Care Collaborative Task Force (C3TF), the Fair Start for Kids Act (FSKA), and Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) entitlement.

I want to thank everyone who contributed to the development of this plan including the Steering Committee, the Early Learning Advisory Committee, the Indian Early Learning Policy Committee, Provider Supports Subcommittee, advocates, communities across Washington state via outreach conducted by Washington Communities for Children (WCFC), and DCYF Staff.

EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION ACCESS AND LIVING WAGE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Washington State Department of CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION ACCESS AND LIVING WAGE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Original Date: October 1, 2025
Early Learning Division | Approved for distribution by Nicole Rose, Assistant Secretary

Washington State Department of CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The Department of Children Youth and Families' (DCYF) vision for early learning is an integrated, mixed-delivery system of affordable, high-quality early care and education for ALL of Washington's children, to support child outcomes, school readiness, and family well-being, regardless of identity or income. The mixed-delivery system includes options like child care, Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), Head Start, Transition to Kindergarten, developmental preschool, school-age care, and more.

The department works to achieve that vision through the pursuit of three key strategic outcomes and priorities:

- 80 percent of Washington children ready for kindergarten
- High-quality early care and education available and affordable to all in Washington
- Eliminate racial disproportionality and advancing racial equity in early education

The Early Care and Education (ECE) Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan supports these goals and strategies, building on previous efforts including the Early Learning Coordination Plan, the Child Care Collaborative Task Force, the Fair Start for Kids Act (FSKA) and ECEAP entitlement. The Proviso (ESSB 5187 Sec. 229(31)) directs DCYF to submit an Implementation Plan to expand access to Washington's mixed delivery system with family financial contributions capped at no more than 7 percent of family income (an amount considered sustainable for families) and living wages and benefits provided for the child care workforce.[1]

The Implementation Plan outlines a comprehensive set of policy recommendations to implement a universally accessible, publicly funded child care system in 10 years. The 10-year phase-in timeframe is scalable and has the potential to be implemented more quickly or more slowly based upon decisions by the State Legislature and responsiveness to the state's evolving fiscal environment. This plan articulates our north star, and specific strategies for reaching it, as resources become available.

Background: The State of Child Care in Washington

Expanding access to ECE opportunities for children and families and improving wages and benefits for the early care and education workforce is a critical need in Washington state. While Washington has made important progress in recent years through efforts such as the FSKA, the gap between where we are today and what families and child care providers need remains substantial. Families face barriers to accessing high quality, affordable ECE opportunities. The ECE workforce faces low wages and insufficient benefits, which contribute to their economic instability and high levels of turnover and burn out. Beyond the impacts on individual families and ECE workers, persistent child care disruptions have substantial implications for Washington's overall economy resulting in identified direct costs of $6.9 billion in 2023, or $6.0 billion in lost Gross State Product.[2]

[1] Washington State 2023-2025 Operating Budget, Sec. 229 (31). https://lawfilesext.leg.wa.gov/biennium/2023-24/Pdf/Bills/Senate%20Passed%20Legislature/5187-S.PL.pdf?q=20230516172937

[2] Eco Northwest, Child Care Aware of WA (2024). Breaking Down: The Economic Cost of Child Care Disruptions in Washington, page 10, paragraph 2, https://childcareforwa.com/breaking-down-the-economic-costs-of-child-care-disruptions-in-

Developing the ECE Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan

The development of the Implementation Plan has been guided by a Steering Committee which includes representation from DCYF, Child Care Aware of Washington, and Service Employees International Union (SEIU) 925 with consultation from families via community outreach. The policy recommendations included in the ECE Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan are informed by existing work in Washington state, community engagement (including families and ECE providers), and exploration of comparable efforts in other states and nationally. Community engagement approaches informing this Plan include three core components:

- **Washington Communities for Children:** DCYF contracted with Washington Communities for Children (WCFC) to convene a series of community conversations across the state to gather information to inform the development of the ECE Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan.[3]
- **DCYF direct outreach:** DCYF staff have held conversations about the Implementation Plan with DCYF advisory committees as well as outreach to DCYF staff.
- **Partners:** Members of the Child Care for WA Partner Roundtable held community conversations throughout the winter and spring of 2024 to inform the development of the Child Care for WA Policy Platform which helped inform the Implementation Plan.[4]

Summary of Implementation Plan Goals and Objectives

The Implementation Plan is organized according to goals, objectives and strategies. These are summarized below. More information about proposed strategies, including implementation needs and proposed phase-in timelines, can be found in the full ECE Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan.

EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION ACCESS AND LIVING WAGE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

GOAL	*OBJECTIVES*
GOAL 1 Families have access to affordable, high quality ECE that meets their needs	• Create a child care guarantee for all families who need and choose to access care. • Reduce barriers and promote equitable access for families. • Increase access to before/after school, summer, and evening/weekend care. • Support inclusion of children with special needs.

washington/#:~:text=Turnover%2C%20absenteeism%2C%20and%20lost%20family%20income%20because%20of,new%20analysis%20from%20Child%20Care%20Aware%20of%20Washington.

[3] https://www.washingtoncfc.org/.

[4] https://childcareforwa.org/partners/ and https://childcareforwa.org/policy-resources/policy-platform/, respectively.

GOAL 2 A thriving ECE Workforce	• Child care providers receive living wages and benefits honoring the essential work they do. • Support child care providers to meet requirements and deliver the high-quality care families need. • Increase relational health and infant and early childhood mental health supports for children and providers in diverse settings.
GOAL 3 Leverage data and align systems	• Ensure access to high quality data to guide decisions and increase accountability. • Enable integrated and inclusive classrooms. • Pair new resources with accountability to support high quality, social equity, anti-judgmental implementation of programs and resources.
GOAL 4 Adequate facilities for expansion of the ECE system	• Maximize investments in the Early Learning Facilities (ELF) program. • Explore and implement new approaches to meet the long-term facilities needs to scale access for children and families.
STRATEGIES FOR EACH OBJECTIVE • Strategy (**what**) • **Why** it is important • **How** it can be implemented	

Cost Modeling

Cost modeling was conducted to estimate the resources needed to reach full implementation of the child care guarantee with living wages and benefits for the ECE workforce in 10 years with expansion beginning in 2029, based on the outcomes of the 2025 legislative session. Modeling and analysis were conducted by Eco Northwest. Implementing the recommendations of the Early Care and Education Access and Living Wage Plan has significant costs and will require additional investment. Cost modeling and related estimates were not available at the time of the report publication. Cost modeling is available upon request.

Conclusion

The ECE Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan charts a clear, phased path toward building a more accessible, equitable, and sustainable early care and education system over the next 10 years. It builds upon the strong foundation of efforts to date and reflects the priorities and perspectives of communities across the state. Both the timing and scale of the strategies outlined in the Plan are dialable and can be adjusted to reflect our state's evolving fiscal context. Many of the strategies included in the Implementation Plan require a

discovery or mapping period as a first step, these are areas where progress can be made in the early years of implementation despite current challenges in the fiscal environment.

By focusing on access and affordability for families, living wages and benefits for ECE workers, strategic program alignment and use of data, and expanded facilities, the plan addresses long-standing systemic issues related to limited access to high quality child care in Washington. Success will require dedicated capacity within DCYF to drive the work forward and measure progress, continued collaboration with communities and partners, and sustained commitment from the State Legislature.

For questions regarding the ECE Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan, please contact DCYF's Government Affairs team at dcyf.govaffairs@dcyf.wa.gov.

Acknowledgements

The Early Care and Education (ECE) Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan was developed in partnership with the ECE Access and Living Wage Steering Committee which, as directed by the proviso, includes representation from the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF), Child Care Aware of Washington, and SEIU 925. We would like to thank everyone for their knowledge and expertise in developing this plan.

Steering Committee Members

- Nicole Rose, DCYF
- Diana Stokes, DCYF
- Matt Judge, DCYF
- Melissa Cheesman, DCYF
- Courtney Parker, DCYF
- Erin Haick, SEIU 925
- Deeann Puffert, Child Care Aware of Washington
- Genevieve Stokes, Child Care Aware of Washington

Input guiding development of the report was provided by:

- Communities across the state provided input via statewide community engagement conducted by Washington Communities for Children (WCFC)
- The Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC)
- The Provider Supports Subcommittee of ELAC
- The Indian Policy Early Learning Committee (IPEL)
- The Child Care for Washington Partner Roundtable
- DCYF staff

Consultant support for the development of the report was provided by Jennifer Jennings-Shaffer, Odyssey Strategic Consulting. Financial and data modeling was supported by Eco Northwest and DCYF staff.

"I opened my licensed family home child care back in 2018. I wanted to do something that brought in an income but also allowed me to raise my children. I have worked hard, built my business and had the opportunity to work with many wonderful families and their children through the years. When I came into this field, I was so incredibly excited and eager to do great things.

As I have learned more about the field and the true struggles that providers and families face in the realm of childcare, I am often left feeling discouraged and sad about the true state of our child care system. Child care is essential, providers and their staff are essential and the families and children we serve are all essential. It is time to start funding it as such."

-Child Care Provider, Early Educator Design Team

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Children Youth and Families' (DCYF) vision for early learning is an integrated, mixed-delivery system of affordable, high-quality early care and education for ALL of Washington's children, to support child outcomes, school readiness, and family well-being, regardless of identity or income. Options include child care, ECEAP, Head Start, Transition to Kindergarten, developmental preschool, school-age care, and more.

DCYF works to achieve that vision through pursuit of 3 key strategic outcomes and priorities:

- 80 percent of Washington children are ready for kindergarten
- High-quality early care and education is available and affordable to all in Washington
- Eliminate racial disproportionality and advance racial equity in early education

The Early Care and Education (ECE) Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan (Implementation Plan) supports these goals and strategies, building on previous efforts including the Early Learning Coordination Plan, the Child Care Collaborative Task Force, the Fair Start for Kids Act (FSKA).[5] The operating budget instruction (ESSB 5187 Sec. 229(31)) directs DCYF to submit an Implementation Plan to expand access to Washington's mixed delivery system with family financial contributions capped at no more than 7 percent of family income (an amount considered sustainable for families) and living wages and benefits for the child care workforce.[6] The Implementation Plan is due to the Legislature by June 30, 2025. As directed, the development of the Implementation Plan has been guided by a Steering Committee which includes representation from DCYF, Child Care Aware of Washington, and SEIU 925 with consultation from families via community outreach. The Implementation Plan must:

- Follow the intent of chapter 199, Laws of 2021 (Fair Start for Kids Act);
- Be aligned with the Cost of Quality Care Rate Model; and
- Include timelines, costs, and statutory changes necessary for timely and effective implementation.

This report outlines a comprehensive set of policy recommendations to implement a universally accessible, publicly funded child care system in ten years. It builds upon the ECE Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan Status Update released in the fall of 2024. The 10-year phase-in timeframe is scalable and has the potential to be implemented more quickly or more slowly based upon decisions by the State Legislature and responsiveness to the state's evolving fiscal environment. The 10-year phase in of Working Connections Child Care eligibility expansion and

[5] https://lawfilesext.leg.wa.gov/biennium/2021-22/Pdf/Bills/Session Laws/Senate/5237-S2.SL.pdf?q=20250702103834

[6] Washington State 2023-2025 Operating Budget, Sec. 229 (31). https://lawfilesext.leg.wa.gov/biennium/2023-24/Pdf/Bills/Senate%20Passed%20Legislature/5187-S.PL.pdf?q=20230516172937

increasing rates to align with the Cost of Quality Care Rate Model is assumed to begin in FY 2030, reflecting outcomes of the 2025 legislative session and the state's current fiscal environment. Low and no-cost Implementation Plan strategies such as mapping and discovery processes will begin this year. Cost modeling was conducted to estimate the resources needed to reach full implementation of the child care guarantee commitment with living wages and benefits for the ECE workforce in 10 years with expansion beginning in FY 2030, based on the outcomes of the 2025 legislative session. Modeling and analysis were conducted by Eco Northwest. Cost modeling information is available upon request and as available will be provided in future updates.

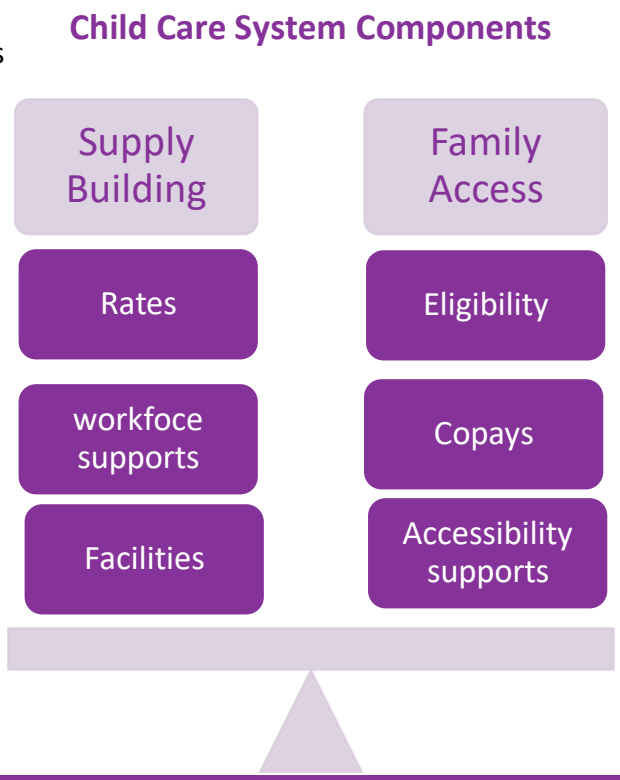
We recognize that Washington is facing a fiscally constrained environment in the near term given the current state and federal fiscal context. The priority at this moment is preserving the foundations of our ECE system so that we can stabilize, build, and move forward over the coming years. This plan builds on the progress made with the passage of the FSKA. It articulates our north star, and specific strategies for reaching it, as resources become available.

The Implementation Plan recommendations provide a deep dive into the child care component of Washington's mixed delivery ECE system. DCYF recognizes that families choose from a variety of settings based on their unique needs and preferences including child care, ECEAP, Head Start, and Transition to Kindergarten. DCYF also recognizes that a strong ECE system requires multiple funding streams. The recommendations of this report both support and depend upon these other elements of the mixed delivery system as we work toward a future where all families have access to high quality ECE opportunities that meet their needs. Simultaneously, the professionals who care for them must receive living wages and benefits that honor the critical work they do. These two levers (families' access, and providers' wages and benefits) must be moved together to build out an integrated, mixed-delivery system that advances affordability, and high-quality ECE programs that benefit ALL of Washington's children.

The goals, objectives, and strategies are designed to balance demand side strategies to increase access and affordability for families and supply side strategies to support and grow the ECE workforce and expand ECE facilities. Access for families depends upon a robust supply of care and living wages for providers that depend upon expanded family eligibility that increases the public share of the child care market.

Implementation will require significant new investments, changes to statutes, and updates to infrastructure such as IT systems. These needs are identified throughout the Implementation Plan. Capacity and resources should be dedicated to regular updates of the Implementation Plan to track progress and refine the content of strategies and phase in timing to reflect the evolving state and federal context. At the time of publishing this report, the cost modeling and cost estimates were not available.

A summary of the Implementation Plan goals and objectives is included below.



EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION ACCESS AND LIVING WAGE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

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GOAL 2 A thriving ECE workforce	• Child care providers receive living wages and benefits honoring the essential work they do. • Support child care providers to meet requirements and deliver the high-quality care families need. • Increase relational health and infant and early childhood mental health supports for children and providers in diverse settings.

GOAL 3 Leverage data and align systems	• Ensure access to high quality data to guide decisions and increase accountability. • Enable integrated and inclusive classrooms. • Pair new resources with accountability to support high quality, social justice, anti-judgmental implementation of programs and resources.
GOAL 4 Adequate facilities for expansion of the ECE system	• Maximize investments in the Early Learning Facilities (ELF) program. • Explore and implement new approaches to meet the long-term facilities needs to scale access for children and families.

STRATEGIES FOR EACH OBJECTIVE

- Strategy (**what**)
- **Why** it is important
- **How** it can be implemented

Background: The State of Child Care in Washington

Expanding access to ECE opportunities for children and families and improving wages and benefits for the early care and education workforce is a critical need in Washington state. While Washington has made important progress in recent years through efforts such as the FSKA, the gap between where we are today and what families and child care providers need remains substantial. Families face barriers to accessing high quality, affordable ECE opportunities. The ECE workforce faces low wages and insufficient benefits, which contribute to their own economic instability and high levels of turnover and burn out. Beyond the impacts on individual families and ECE workers, these challenges have substantial implications for Washington's overall economy resulting in an estimated cost of $6.9 billion in 2023.[7] The data in this section provides a snapshot of the current impacts of the child care crisis in our state.

Washington families lack access to affordable, high-quality ECE opportunities

There are approximately 1,167,764 children age 12 and under living in Washington state, including about 433,540 children under 5 years old.[8] DCYF estimates that families of

[7] Eco Northwest, Child Care Aware of Washington (2024), page 10, second paragraph. Breaking Down: The Economic Cost of Child Care Disruptions in Washington: https://childcareforwa.com/breaking-down-the-economic-costs-of-child-care-disruptions-in-washington/#:~:text=Turnover%2C%20absenteeism%2C%20and%20lost%20family%20income%20because%20of,new%20analysis%20from%20Child%20Care%20Aware%20of%20Washington.

[8] Department of Children Youth and Families. Early Learning Data Store 2.0. Data current as of June 2024.

approximately 302,000 children, aged birth through 5, who are not yet in school still need access to child care, because all available parents in the home are working[9]. However, only around 29 percent of these children are served by licensed child care, preschool, and/or subsidized child care. Additionally, DCYF estimates that families of approximately 469,000 school-age children (kindergarten through age 12) need care, and yet only about 12 percent of these children are served by licensed child care, preschool, and/or subsidized child care.[10] Many of these children are in informal care settings. In some cases, this reflects family preference, in other cases it reflects barriers to accessing licensed child care settings that limit parent choice. Several factors limit families' ability to access the care that they need:

1. **THERE IS NOT ENOUGH LICENSED CHILD CARE AVAILABLE.**
   In 2023, 45 percent of Washington's birth to age 12 population lived in what is defined as an extreme child care access desert.[11] Challenges finding care are particularly acute for families with infants and toddlers and those living in rural areas.

2. **EVEN IF FAMILIES CAN FIND CHILD CARE, THEY MAY NOT BE ABLE TO AFFORD IT.**
   The cost of child care at the 85th percentile of private pay rates across age groups and in all regions costs more than in-state undergraduate tuition at the University of Washington.[12] [13] The cost of full-time child care for an infant and a child in preschool can equal up to 35 percent of a two-parent family's income and up to 150 percent of a single parent's income.[14]

   Working Connections Child Care provides critical help paying for child care for Washington families. While recent expansions have made important progress, the program remains inaccessible for many families who would stand to benefit. Eligibility for Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) is currently capped at 60 percent of the State Median Income (SMI) for families entering the program (approximately $54,1014

[9] Department of Children Youth and Families. Child Care and Early Learning Need and Supply Data Dashboard: https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/practice/oiaa/reports/early-learning-dashboards/child-care-need-supply-data. Retrieved September 2024. "Need" estimates are derived from U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, defined as children with all available parents in the labor force.

[10] Department of Children Youth and Families. Child Care and Early Learning Need and Supply Data Dashboard: https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/practice/oiaa/reports/early-learning-dashboards/child-care-need-supply-data. Retrieved September 2024. "Supply" estimates are from DCYF subsidy warrant data (including Family, Friends, and Neighbor care), ECEAP enrollment data, Head Start slot counts, and estimates of private pay child care participation. Supply estimates do not include Transitional Kindergarten programs operated by school districts.

[11] https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/reports/FSKA-EvalReport-2023.pdf

[12] The 85th percentile is a benchmark for setting child care subsidy rates, meaning that families using child care subsidies should have access to 85 percent of the child care programs in their community.

[13] University of Washington. Undergraduate Tuition Dashboard | Office of Planning & Budgeting: https://www.washington.edu/opb/tuition-fees/current-tuition-and-fees-dashboards/undergraduate-tuition-dashboard/.

[14] Washington State Department of Commerce (2021). Child Care Collaborative Task Force Legislative Report: https://deptofcommerce.app.box.com/s/tc6pqaz3cgufb8mq6ygdzjbjlghunn29.

annually for a family of 2). It was slated to increase to 75 percent of State Median Income (approximately $67,518 annually for a family of 2) in 2025 per the FSKA, however, the State Legislature delayed that expansion to 2029 during the 2025 legislative session due to the current state budget shortfall. This leaves behind many families who do not qualify based on income but struggle to pay for child care. Copayments can remain a barrier for families that do qualify. While the FSKA dramatically reduced family copayments, the State Legislature adopted a new increased copayment scale in 2025 as a cost saving measure, effective October 1, 2026. Family copayments will be $0 for families with a household income under 25 percent SMI and range between 5 percent and 6.5 percent of a family of two for other eligible income ranges.

3. **AVAILABLE EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION MUST MEET FAMILY NEEDS AND PREFERENCES.** Access means more than just the availability of early care and education. Factors including quality of care, appropriateness of care for children with special needs and complex needs, availability of care during non-standard hours, and cultural and linguistic alignment of services with families served are all important components of ECE access for families. Currently, approximately 17 percent of WCCC eligible families receive subsidies.[15] This low rate of utilization highlights the importance of ensuring an adequate supply of ECE services that meet family needs and preferences and ensure families are aware of the benefits for which they are eligible.

Wages and Benefits for The ECE Workforce are too low

While families face substantial challenges finding and paying for ECE services, the ECE workforce faces low wages and inadequate benefits which threaten their own economic stability and contributes to widespread staffing shortages and turnover within ECE programs, undermining both access and quality for children and families. As of 2020 (the most recent data available), 39 percent of Washington child care providers relied on one or more sources of public assistance to make ends meet.[16] The estimated annual turnover rate for child care workers is 43 percent.[17]

[15] Department of Children Youth and Families. Estimated Child Care Subsidy Uptake Dashboard: https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/practice/oiaa/reports/early-learning-dashboards/subsidy-takeup.
[16] Gould, E., Whitebook, M., Mokhiber, Z., & Austin, L. Economic Policy Institute and University of California Berkeley Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (2020). Financing Early Educator Quality - A Values Based Budget for Every State: https://cscce.berkeley.edu/publications/report/financing-early-educator-quality-a-values-based-budget-for-every-state/.
[17] Washington State Department of Commerce (2021). Child Care Collaborative Task Force Legislative Report: https://deptofcommerce.app.box.com/s/tc6pqaz3cgufb8mq6ygdzjbjlghunn29.

Low wages and benefits for the ECE workforce are driven by the broken economics of child care. Put simply, the cost to deliver high quality child care – including living wages and benefits for the workforce – exceeds the amount that families can afford to pay.

WCCC reimbursement rates are currently set according to the Market Rate Survey which reflects the rates families can pay in the private market, not the true cost to deliver high-quality care. These rates do not support living wages and benefits for ECE professionals. Current WCCC rates for child care centers have fallen below the 85th percentile of private pay rates as they are set at the 2021 Market Rate Survey. Licensed family home programs remain at the 85th percentile but are set at 2024 Market Rate Survey. Upon completion of the 2025 Market Rate Survey, the data will inform how WCCC rates compare to private pay rates, including any variations across most age groups and geographic regions. The gap in rates is even larger when compared to the true cost of high-quality care as captured in the **Cost of Quality Care Rate Model** developed in 2023 by the Early Educator Design Team and DCYF through a collaborative process using human centered design.[18] The Cost of Quality Care Rate Model builds upon the Cost Estimation Calculator Developed by the Child Care Collaborative Taskforce to provide a data driven model for setting rates based on the true quality of care, including living wages and benefits for the ECE workforce. The insufficiency of using market rates to set subsidy rates is widely acknowledged in the field as evidenced by Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) rules allowing the use of alternative methodologies and the increasing number of states turning to cost of quality care rate models. The Child Care Collaborative Taskforce recommended transitioning to a cost of quality care rate model inclusive of living wages and the FSKA directed DCYF to develop and implement one.

Lack of access to affordable, high-quality early care and education harms the Washington state economy

The lack of access to affordable, high-quality early care and education opportunities has negative impacts on Washington state's economy. While investments included in the Fair Start for Kids Act buffered Washington's ECE system from the worst impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, pre-existing shortfalls in access for families and sufficient compensation for ECE workers remain and are compounded by the pressures of increasing costs driven by inflation. The recently released report Breaking Down: The Economic Cost of Child Care Disruptions in Washington sponsored by Child Care Aware of Washington and Ready Nation leverages recent

[18] https://childcareforwa.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Early-Educator-Design-Team-Cost-of-Quality-Care-Recommendations-Full-Report.pdf#:~:text=The%20Cost%20of%20Quality%20Care%20Rate%20Model%20takes,meet%20the%20true%20cost%20of%20providing%20high-quality%20care.

parent survey data and lessons gleaned from similar studies to articulate the specific impacts of the ECE crisis on Washington's economy.[19]

The report cites the costs of turnover, absenteeism, and lost family income associated with child care issues totaling $6.9 billion in 2023. These impacts translate into a loss of federal, state, and local taxes of nearly $1.5 billion.[20] The report notes that impacts are likely higher than what is quantified because the analysis only captures a snapshot for 2023 and does not include the likely long-term impacts for parents. These may include lower future employment and wages due to missed work and education during 2023, and potentially the long-term effects on children that result from inadequate care during their childhood.

[19] https://childcareforwa.com/breaking-down-the-economic-costs-of-child-care-disruptions-in-washington/#:~:text=Turnover%2C%20absenteeism%2C%20and%20lost%20family%20income%20because%20of,new%20analysis%20from%20Child%20Care%20Aware%20of%20Washington.

[20] Eco Northwest, Child Care Aware of Washington (2024), page 10, second paragraph. Breaking Down: The Economic Cost of Child Care Disruptions in Washington: https://childcareforwa.com/breaking-down-the-economic-costs-of-child-care-disruptions-in-washington/#:~:text=Turnover%2C%20absenteeism%2C%20and%20lost%20family%20income%20because%20of,new%20analysis%20from%20Child%20Care%20Aware%20of%20Washington.

DEVELOPING THE ECE ACCESS AND LIVING WAGE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Washington State Department of CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

Original Date: October 1, 2025

Early Learning Division | Approved for distribution by Nicole Rose; Assistant Secretary

Developing the ECE Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan

The policy recommendations included in the ECE Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan are informed by existing work in Washington state, community engagement (including families and ECE providers), and exploration of comparable efforts in other states and nationally.

Existing policies investments, and programs

Washington has made progress to improve ECE access for children and families and strategies to support the workforce that serve them in meeting the needs of children in their care. This includes understanding the scope of the problem, identification of possible solutions, and in some cases implementation of improved policies and investments. Critically, continued implementation progress of the Fair Start for Kids Act is the foundation of the ECE Access and Living Wage Plan. A detailed overview of existing efforts is included in Appendix D.[21]

Policy Scan

As a preliminary step in the development of the ECE Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan, a policy scan was conducted to provide insight into national and state examples of policies and investments to increase ECE access, affordability, and workforce compensation. The Policy Scan is included in Appendix E.[22]

Community Engagement

Hand in hand with its equity principles, DCYF is committed to engaging communities and centering the lived experience of those directly impacted by policy because doing so improves child outcomes and prevents disproportionality. The ECE Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan will be built upon the foundation laid in the efforts described above and extensive efforts to engage communities, including parents, ECE workforce, business, and others. Community engagement approaches informing the Implementation Plan include three core components:

- **Washington Communities for Children:** DCYF contracted with Washington Communities for Children (WCFC) to convene a series of community conversations across the state to gather information to develop the ECE Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan.[23] WCFC is a network of 10 regional coalitions, which are composed of parents, providers, community members, and more, who are dedicated to improving the wellbeing of children, families, and communities. More information about the project can be found in Appendix F.[24]

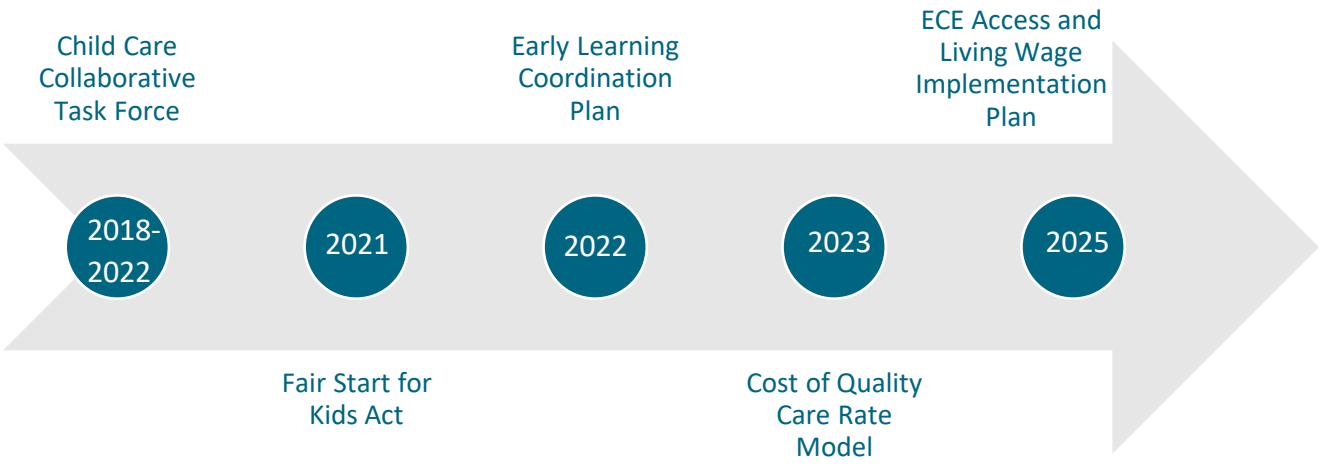
[21] Located at the bottom of page 49.
[22] Located at the top of page 50.
[23] https://www.washingtoncfc.org/.
[24] Located near the top of page 50.

- **DCYF direct outreach:** DCYF staff have held conversations about the Implementation Plan with DCYF advisory committees as well as outreach to DCYF staff. A summary of outreach activities and findings can be found in Appendix G.[25]

- **Partners:** Members of the Child Care for WA Partner Roundtable, which is composed of early childhood advocates, including representation from the Early Educator Design Team, held community conversations throughout the winter and spring of 2024 to inform the development of the Child Care for WA Policy Platform.[26] The policy focus areas were structured to align with the component areas of the ECE Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan.

[25] Located at the middle of page 50.
[26] https://childcareforwa.org/partners/, https://childcareforwa.org/the-early-educator-design-team/, and https://childcareforwa.org/the-early-educator-design-team/, respectively.

Key Milestones the ECE Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan Builds Upon



Organizing the Plan

GOALS	High-level aims, which build upon and align with existing efforts, to provide long-term direction ensuring access to affordable, high-quality ECE opportunities for all families and living wages and benefits for the workforce.
OBJECTIVES	Specific, measurable, and achievable targets toward the goals, relevant to current needs and priorities.

STRATEGIES	Describe the approaches to achieving objectives and goals. Each strategy includes a description of why it is important and what anticipated implementation would look like, including sequencing and necessary changes to statutes, staffing, and infrastructure. Some of the strategies are very specific and others will require a discovery period to inform full implementation. Strategies will by necessity evolve and continue to be refined over the course of Implementation Plan rollout.
COST PROJECTIONS	Working from the assumption of a 10-year phase in timeline, cost projections are broken out into 5 biennia. Cost projections are approximate estimates based upon currently available information.

Measuring Progress

TRACK PROGRESS

- Updates to the Implementation Plan every two years will allow tracking of progress over time.

UPDATE AND REFINE STRATEGIES

- This Implementation Plan is not static. Strategies, as well as their timelines for phase in, will evolve based upon lessons learned through implementation, community engagement, and the emerging context of the state fiscal environment.

MEASURE OUTCOMES FOR EQUITY

- Using data to track outcomes across metrics such as program participation, language access, growth of the ECE workforce, and quality improvement with an emphasis on impacts to Washington's culturally and linguistically diverse communities will promote social justice and racial equity in implementation.
- Align tracking progress of the Implmentation Plan rollout with tracking progress of DCYF priority outcomes including children's school readiness, reductions in child welfare involvement and improved outcomes for families who are involved, quality improvement for ECE programs as measured by Early Achievers, and improved coordination between ECE providers and the K-12 school system.

GOAL 1: FAMILIES HAVE ACCESS TO HIGH QUALITY ECE THAT MEETS THEIR NEEDS

WHAT IS HIGH-QUALITY?

Early Achievers is Washington state's quality recognition and improvement system. It was developed to help early learning and school-aged programs offer high-quality care to support each child's learning and development. Early Achievers is designed to:

- Ensure children have high-quality early learning experiences to develop skills they need to be successful in school and life.
- Support early learning professionals with resources like professional development, coaching, mental health consultation, and financial supports.
- Help families and caregivers find high-quality child care that fits their unique needs.

Licensed ECE programs receiving child care subsidies and ECEAP contractors are required to participate in Early Achievers and attain at least a level 3 rating. When the term high-quality early care and education is used throughout this document it assumes that licensed programs are engaging in Early Achievers to measure and improve program quality over time.

"Our family currently pays close to 2 thousand dollars for infant care and after school care. With the cost of housing and inflation, this makes it difficult to live more than just month to month."
– Parent Survey Respondent

OBJECTIVE 1.1: Create a child care guarantee for all Washington families who need and choose to access care.

1.1.1 Maximize access to affordable child care within current CCDF rules

- **Why this is important:** Expanding child care in Washington via the WCCC program supports leveraging existing infrastructure, minimizes administrative complexity, and promotes clarity for families.

- **How it can be implemented:** As DCYF and the State Legislature consider the recommendations of the Implementation Plan, policies and investments must be in alignment with federal CCDF rules such as child age and family income eligibility rules, capping family copayments at 7 percent of family income, and policies related to provider payments such as enrollment based and prospective payments.

1.1.2 Remove the income cap and make all families, regardless of income, eligible for WCCC

- **Why this is important:** A phased-in elimination of income eligibility limits, alongside increased investments in the program and targeted supply building strategies, will support all Washington families who want and need child care to access it. For families, it will simplify the process of understanding their eligibility for child care subsidy. Expanded eligibility will help stabilize the child care market for providers, enabling providers to pay living wages and benefits without increasing costs beyond what private pay families can afford.

- **How it can be implemented:** Building on the outcomes of the 2025 legislative session, the suggested phase-in below expands eligibility for families making up to 300 percent of State Median Income (SMI) over 10 years. Expansion for families at 300 percent or above is recommended to occur in the following biennium.
    - Biennium 1 (2029-31): up to 75 percent of SMI
    - Biennium 2 (2031-33): up to 100 percent of SMI
    - Biennium 3 (2033-35): up to 150 percent of SMI
    - Biennium 4 (2035-37): up to 200 percent SMI
    - Biennium 5 (FY 34-35): up to 300 percent SMI

  Implementation will require updating the WCCC statute to reflect expanded eligibility and funding from the State Legislature to pay for subsidies for newly eligible families. DCYF will need time to update the eligibility and payment systems to support new eligibility and staffing to support the increased caseload.

1.1.3 Institute a copayment scale that preserves access and ensures affordability for families

- **Why this is important:** The proviso directs the Implementation Plan to include strategies to ensure that no family pays more than 7 percent of their income for child care. 7 percent has come to be widely recognized as a benchmark for affordability for families and it is the maximum amount allowable under federal CCDF rules. It is important to acknowledge that 7 percent is a ceiling rather than a floor and that for families with very low incomes a copayment of 7 percent may pose a significant barrier to accessing care and maintaining family economic stability.

- **How it can be implemented:** As eligibility for WCCC expands through the phase-in of the child care guarantee, updates to the copayment scale should be guided by the following principles:

    - The copayment system should be easy for families and providers to understand and navigate, this includes maintaining copayment determinations at the household level rather than per child.

    - Copayments must be affordable for families, with particular consideration given to minimizing barriers for families furthest from opportunity.

    - Families with the lowest incomes should be exempt from copayments. This exemption currently applies to families making less than 20 percent of the state median income. One of the recommendations from communities during community engagement efforts in developing this plan was to expand the income limit for copay exemptions and extend the exemption to families who have a child with a disability, are enrolled in Head Start/Early Head Start, are involved with child protective services, and other exemptions to be determined as needed**.**

    - Copayment increases over time should be tied to metrics that reflect inflationary increases such as SMI.

  Updates to the copayment scale may require adjustments to statute, investments from the State Legislature, and updates to IT infrastructure. It is recommended that updates begin in 2029 to address copayments for newly eligible families through phase-in of the child care guarantee.

OBJECTIVE 1.2: Reduce barriers and promote equitable access for families.

1.2.1 Expand WCCC approved activities for full time care, including families who are income eligible and participating in programs such as, but not limited to, Head Start, TANF, SNAP, English language classes, and Working Families Tax Credit.

- **Why this is important:** Verification of participation in an approved activity is necessary for families to receive authorization for care via WCCC (either part time or full time). Current limitations to approved WCCC activities mean that some families who would benefit are not eligible for the program. Adding a set of easily verified categories to the list of approved activities would reduce barriers to access for families furthest from opportunity. Many of these families would presumably have already qualified (for example, families receiving the Working Families Tax Credit are by definition working) this change would reduce administrative complexity.

- **How it can be implemented:** Implementation will depend upon funding from the State Legislature to pay for increases to the caseload of families participating in WCCC, updates to statute, and updates to IT infrastructure. It should also be noted that the current statute allows DCYF to add participation in 4-year degree programs to the list of approved activities subject to funds appropriated for that purpose which up to now has not occurred. It is recommended that implementation occur alongside expansion of eligibility for WCCC in 2029.

1.2.2 Allocate resources for education and outreach to families

- **Why this is important:** Education and outreach are critical for ensuring families are aware of the benefits they are eligible for and are able to successfully navigate application and enrollment processes. While some resources currently exist, additional resources are necessary to support the scale up of the child care system as more families become eligible and to improve utilization rates for currently eligible families. Based on the latest OIAA Subsidy Uptake Dashboard, this was around 17 percent in July 2024.[27]

- **How it can be implemented:** Implementation of this recommendation will first require mapping of existing family outreach and engagement mechanisms and assessment of gaps and opportunities for expansion and improvement, in consultation with families and partners. Planning efforts should identify opportunities that can be implemented within existing agency allocations vs. those that require additional investment from the State Legislature. Mapping and planning should take place within the first biennium of the Implementation Plan rollout with actions in successive biennium to be determined. For scale up of existing approaches, see DCYF formula for additional outreach resources

[27] Department of Children Youth and Families. Estimated Child Care Subsidy Uptake Dashboard: https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/practice/oiaa/reports/early-learning-dashboards/subsidy-takeup.

needed to accompany expansion of family eligibility in the DCYF 2025 WCCC decision package.[28]

1.2.3 Create a streamlined online application and eligibility determination process with both online and phone support available in multiple languages.

- **Why this is important:** Streamlined online application and eligibility determination for WCCC will make it easier for families to access the program and support administrative efficiency. The process of documentation and verification can prove confusing and burdensome for families. Including online and phone support available in multiple languages is essential to ensuring equitable access to services for Washington's diverse children and families.

- **How it can be implemented:** DCYF will continue to partner with the Health and Human Services Coalition (HHS) and the Integrated Eligibility and Enrollment (IE&E) work to develop an online portal and eligibility application that improves outreach, communication, benefit applications and eligibility determination. The portal should support multiple languages. Additional phone support should be available for other languages. The implementation timeline will depend upon investment from the State Legislature.

OBJECTIVE 1.3: Increase access to before/after school, summer, and evening/weekend care.

1.3.1 Increase WCCC rates for Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) care.

- **Why this is important:** Many families rely on FFN care for non-standard hours care and summer care when licensed child care options are often extremely limited (as well as other reasons related to family preference). FFN rates are subject to collective bargaining and the current rate is up to $40 per day per child regardless of child age or the region in which the FFN provider is located. Graduated increases to the WCCC rates paid to FFN providers alongside increases to rates for licensed centers and family home child cares recognize the important contributions of FFN providers to WA's child care system and support the long-term sustainability of access to this care.

- **How it can be implemented**: Factors to consider as increases to FFN rates are addressed through future collective bargaining include:
  - Cost of living
  - State median income
  - Current rates for licensed child care

[28] https://dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/F4_WCCC-Eligibility-75-SMI-Dual-Lan.pdf.

Implementation will depend upon the State Legislature funding future collective bargaining agreements inclusive of rate increases.

1.3.2 Expand quality improvement supports for school age programs.

- **Why this is important**: High-quality programs engage in a continuous quality improvement process to meet young people's needs with programming that is culturally responsive, inclusive, and accessible. There is a high level of unmet family demand for high-quality school age care. Early Achievers was not designed to support school-age children, and currently, the state does not fund quality improvement for programs serving exclusively school-age children. Programs serving children birth to five as well as school age children are able to participate in Early Achievers with all classrooms included in the quality recognition process, but in- depth supports like coaching are targeted to birth to five classrooms. School's Out Washington (SOWA) has led quality improvement for the school-age field since 2009 through an assessment, coaching, and learning community model.[29] Only programs that can afford the services or are supported by a funder can access these targeted school age supports.

- **How it can be implemented:** Revisit the school age care pilot recommendations in partnership with OSPI and school age partners to assess feasibility of implementation, options for phasing, and identification of resources necessary to advance. The pilot was funded by the State Legislature between 2015 and 2020, building on its investments in Early Achievers, to explore how Washington can support quality school age child care and other expanded learning programming as an extension of the quality system built in birth to five learning environments. At the culmination of the pilot, the design team submitted a report with recommendations for the expansion of this model both within school age classrooms that are part of centers engaged with Early Achievers as well as outside of Early Achievers for School-Age Only Child Care programs.

1.3.3 Expand the WCCC rate enhancement for non-standard hours care.

- **Why this is important:** Non-standard hours care (before 6:00am or after 6:00pm on weekdays or anytime on weekends) is essential for Washington families in a variety of occupations vital to our state economy including retail, health care, military, and agriculture. Child care programs incur additional costs to provide non-standard hours care because responding to the care needs of families during these periods often means that staff are caring for a smaller number of children for at least part of the

[29] https://schoolsoutwashington.org/about-quality-improvement/.

time. This disincentive for providers to offer care during non-standard hours contributes to access barriers for families. The current WCCC rate enhancement for non-standard hours care is insufficient to cover the additional costs incurred by providers and difficult to access for many providers. Improvements to the rate enhancement are necessary to maintain and grow the supply of this care.

- **How it can be implemented:**
  - Increase the monthly rate enhancement from the current amount of $135 to $500 as recommended by the Early Education Design Team.[30]
  - Reduce the number of non-standard hours care required for providers to receive the rate enhancement for a child from 30 hours per month to 20.
  - Calculate the number of hours required for providers to receive the rate enhancement based on enrollment rather than attendance.

It is recommended that implementation of the above recommendations be considered for the 2027-29 biennium. Implementation will depend upon investment from the State Legislature, updates to statute, and updates to IT infrastructure.

OBJECTIVE 1.4: Support inclusion of children with special needs.

1.4.1 Allow presumptive eligibility for the WCCC special needs rate so that services are not delayed while awaiting eligibility for special education and related services.[31]

Why this is important: Unlike K-12 where access to services for children with special needs is legally required (and publicly funded), there is not an equivalent requirement for private child care businesses. Increasing access to supports such as enhanced rates and tailored professional development (discussed in Goal 2) are critical for supporting and encouraging these programs to serve children with special needs.

The WCCC special needs rate supplement provides critical resources for child care providers to deliver responsive care to children with a unique physical, emotional, or developmental need requiring additional staff capacity. Conducting a thorough evaluation and developing an individualized plan for a child with a disability can be a time-intensive process. This can present challenges for child care providers in ensuring they have the necessary resources to effectively address the unique needs of each child in their care. For families, this means that children may not be receiving care that fully meets their needs or they may simply not be able to find care at all. Allowing

[30] Early Educator Design Team, Cost of Quality Care Rate Model Recommendations, 2023. https://childcareforwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Early-Educator-Design-Team-Cost-of-Quality-Care-Recommendations-Full-Report.pdf

[31] https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/earlylearning-childcare/getting-help/wccc/special-needs-rate.

presumptive eligibility for the special needs rate will result in improved quality and access to child care for children with special needs and their families.

- **How it can be implemented**: The WCCC special needs rate enhancement is set in rule and includes Level 1, which is the standard rate enhancement, and Level 2 for children with needs that are more extensive than can be covered by the Level 1 rate.[32] Level 2 rates are variable up to a cap based upon the individual needs of the child. Implementation of this recommendation requires modifying the application process for the special needs rate to allow families and providers to apply for the rate enhancement prior to the child's eligibility for special education and related services. This will allow providers to receive the Level 1 special needs rate enhancement while awaiting an evaluation to determine whether the child has a disability and needs special education and related services. A full and individualized initial evaluation must be done by the district before the provision of any special education or related services to a student with a disability can begin. Upon eligibility for special education and related services, the case should be re-evaluated to determine if Level 2 rate enhancement is required to meet the unique needs of the child. It is recommended that implementation of this recommendation begin in the 2027-29 biennium.

  Implementation will depend upon investment from the State Legislature and updates to the Washington Administrative Code.

1.4.2 Create pathways for child care providers to access resources to meet the complex needs of children in their care who do not (and may never) qualify for special education and related services.

- **Why this is important:** There are a variety of reasons why children presenting unique needs may not have qualified for special education and related services - including lack of access to specialists, long waits to see available specialists, the complexity of the individualized needs of very young children, and parental hesitation to pursue an initial evaluation. Child care providers, in partnership with families, are well positioned to identify strategies and resources that could help meet the needs of children in their care.

  The Complex Needs Fund established through the FSKA gives providers a flexible funding opportunity to promote inclusive, least restrictive environments and support providers serving children with developmental delays, disabilities, behavioral needs, or

[32] https://app.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=110-15-0220

other unique needs.[33] Grants can be used for adding staff members or increasing current staff hours, therapeutic services, facility improvements to comply with ADA accessibility requirements or behavioral needs, and supportive and adaptive materials and equipment. Demand for these grants far exceeds supply and grant amounts are not always sufficient to meet the needs of children in care.

The Pyramid Model is another resource for ECE providers to support the needs of all children in their care.[34] It is a conceptual framework of evidence-based practices for promoting young children's healthy social and emotional development. It is a tiered support system that is structured to provide support based on the intensity of the needs of the child. The model offers levels of intervention and universal supports, ensuring all children have full access to their classroom environment. A pilot in FY 24 in 10 classrooms across 3 sites indicates that investment in the WA Pyramid Model produces meaningful outcomes from children and practitioners.

- **How it can be implemented:** Continuation and expansion of the Complex Needs Fund and expansion of Pyramid Model both depend upon investment from the State Legislature.

1.4.3 Expand supports and coordination between programs for special needs care, minimizing disruptions to children.

- **Why this is important:** Children with special needs transition between a variety of settings on a given day and over time (examples of settings children may transition between include ECEAP, child care, K12 school, before/after school, and Transition to Kindergarten). The type and level of specialized supports received by children can vary across these settings and lack of coordination can result in disruptions. Improving coordination and alignment across settings will improve the quality of care for children with special needs and their families.

- **How it can be implemented:** DCYF in partnership with OSPI should conduct a discovery process, including consultation with families and providers, in the first biennium of Implementation Plan rollout to clarify current pain points for families and providers and generate an implementation plan for supporting inclusion with focus on family choice,

[33] https://dcyf.wa.gov/services/early-learning-providers/child-care-grants/complex-needs-fund-grant#:~:text=The%20fund%20is%20intended%20to%20promote%20inclusive%2C%20least-restrictive,delays%2C%20disabilities%2C%20behavioral%20needs%2C%20and%2For%20other%20unique%20needs.
[34] Form EPS_0073 (Rev. 12-2021), https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pubs/EPS_0073.pdf.

care options, and service area agreements. Discovery should occur in the 2025-27 biennium with actions in successive biennium to be determined based on findings.

GOAL 2: SUPPORT A THRIVING EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION WORKFORCE

"We need to attract high quality providers. However, childcare is not always seen as a "lucrative" career, nor does it receive the respect that it deserves. This often leads to people not joining this workforce or leaving early in their careers. Early childhood educators/child care providers should be treated as professionals and be compensated accordingly. We can't keep high-quality teachers when we can't pay them what they deserve."

– Child Care Provider, Provider Supports Subcommittee

OBJECTIVE 2.1: Child care workers receive living wages and benefits honoring the essential work they do.

2.1.1 Use the Cost of Quality Care Rate Model to set WCCC rates which reflect the true cost of high-quality care.

- **Why this is important:** Historically, Washington has set WCCC rates based upon the results of the Market Rate Survey. Market rates reflect what parents can pay in the private market, but they do not reflect what it costs for child care providers to deliver high-quality care, including living wages and benefits for workers. This disparity is one of the reasons child care is often referred to as a broken market. The Cost of Quality Care Rate Model developed by DCYF through a collaborative process with the Early Educator Design Team builds upon the Cost Estimation Calculator developed by the Child Care Collaborative Task Force to provide a data-based model for setting WCCC rates.

  The urgency of addressing the compensation crisis for ECE workers came up frequently in community engagement to develop the Implementation Plan. One of the recommendations was to implement interim mechanisms, such as grants, to support wages while working toward implementation of the Cost of Quality Care Rate model. After careful consideration, it is the recommendation of the Steering Committee to prioritize the implementation and funding of the Cost of Quality Care Rate model as rapidly as possible as the most sustainable and comprehensive way of addressing the critical need for living wages and benefits for the ECE workforce.

- **How it can be implemented:** The Washington Cost of Quality Care Rate Model has been approved by the federal Office of Child Care as an alternative rate setting methodology. The Cost of Quality Care Study conducted every two years will allow DCYF to update the Cost Estimation Calculator to determine what it costs to implement that model, based upon cost data collected from child care providers across the state. The recommended phase-in schedule below brings rates up to the full level of the Cost of Quality Care Rate Model.
  - Biennium 1 (2029-31): 75 percent of the Cost of Quality Care Rate Model according to the most recent Cost of Quality Care Study.
  - Biennium 2 (2031-33): 80 percent of the Cost of Quality Care Rate Model according to the most recent Cost of Quality Care Study.
  - Biennium 3 (2033-35): 90 percent of the Cost of Quality Care Rate Model according to the most recent Cost of Quality Care Study.
  - Biennium 4 (2035-37): 100 percent of the Cost of Quality Care Rate Model according to the most recent Cost of Quality Care Study.

- Biennium 5 (2037-39): 100 percent of the Cost of Quality Care Rate Model updated to reflect the most recent Cost of Quality Care Study.

Implementation will require the State Legislature to adopt the Cost of Quality Care Rate Model as the methodology guiding rate setting for WCCC and will depend upon investment from the State Legislature to increase WCCC rates. Rates for licensed family home child care providers are subject to collective bargaining.

2.1.2 Institute a wage scale which includes a wage floor for all child care workers and wage bands that allow flexibility for child care employers.

- **Why this is important**: Staff compensation is the largest expense for child care programs, but current rates are insufficient to pay workers living wages and provide adequate benefits. With new public investment in WCCC rates to support living wages and benefits, development and implementation of a wage scale for workers is a way to ensure that workers are paid fairly and equitably across child care settings with a clear pathway for career advancement. The wage floor should reflect current standards for licensing and Early Achievers.

- **How it can be implemented**: The wage scale should be developed in consultation with child care providers. Any new industry-specific compensation requirements should only be enforced once implementation of the child care guarantee has reached sufficient scale to ensure adequate public resources in system for child care employers to be able to meet wage requirements. Sufficient scale depends both upon the rates being adequate and WCCC eligibility for families having expanded to the point that private pay families are not forced to shoulder the burden of wage increases. Any wage requirement should include exemptions for owner/operators. Enforcement of any new compensation requirements would need to rest with the Department of Labor and Industries; compensation oversight is not in DCYF's scope as an agency. The question of what constitutes sufficient scale should be determined in consultation with ECE providers and partners and addressed in updates to this Plan.

OBJECTIVE 2.2: Support child care providers to meet requirements and deliver the high-quality care families need.

2.2.1 Establish adequate infrastructure to deliver provider support services. Make services available in child care provider home languages with support for navigating systems.

- **Why this is important:** As more families become eligible for WCCC it is critical to grow the supply of high-quality child care to meet increased demand for services. Existing DCYF support services for providers (such as relationship based professional

development, licensing, coaching, etc.) will need to be scaled up to meet the needs of a growing number of child care providers. In addition to the staffing and infrastructure associated with the services themselves, staff capacity is needed to support providers who require assistance navigating systems. Making services and supports available in the state's top 3 languages (with interpretation available for other languages) will help to sustain and grow a child care workforce that reflects the cultural and linguistic diversity of Washington families.

- **How it can be implemented:** DCYF is working to establish a methodology using the caseload forecast to predict and provide adequate staffing and infrastructure, this will be completed in 2025. Once complete, this methodology will serve to identify infrastructure needs to meet increased demands as child care subsidy caseloads grow. Implementation will depend upon investment by the State Legislature in future biennia alongside expansions of family eligibility.

2.2.2 Provide adequate community-based, linguistically and culturally aligned professional development and resources, including relationship-based professional development coaching, to support and grow the capacity of the child care workforce to meet the increasing family demand for ECE services.

- **Why this is important:** ECE programs and individual workers depend upon access to high-quality professional development and resources to help them navigate the business side of owning and operating a child care program, to meet licensing requirements (including staff qualification requirements), and to engage in ongoing learning to grow the quality of their practice. Through partnerships with DCYF, community-based organizations such as Child Care Aware of Washington, the Imagine Institute, Voices of Tomorrow, School's Out Washington, and others are the main providers of ongoing professional development and resources for the ECE workforce. These resources are critical for maintaining and growing the supply of high-quality, affordable child care available to families.

  Currently, available professional development services are insufficient to meet demand. The ability to meet demand for professional development services will be further constrained as expansion of the ECE system progresses if additional capacity is not added.

- **How it can be implemented:** Investment from the State Legislature will be necessary to improve the availability of professional development resources for the ECE workforce of today and to meet the needs of the future workforce. In the early phases of implementation this includes things like increasing the number of Early Achievers

coaches to lower caseloads and expanding access to training and resources that support new child care businesses to get started. In later phases of implementation, it includes scaling up access to supports and resources to meet increased demand and continuing to explore creative opportunities to meet emerging community professional development needs. Projected growth needs are included in cost modeling work, which can be made available upon request.

2.2.3 Promote equitable access to grants, enhancements, and incentives for providers.

- **Why this is important:** A robust system of grants, enhancements, and incentives is essential for meeting the needs of special populations, incentivizing growth in areas of need, and supporting providers to increase quality. These resources support growing the supply of high-quality ECE options available for families.

- **How it can be implemented:** The 2025 legislative session resulted in reductions to many existing resources. At this time, there is an opportunity to review the current suite of grants, enhancements, and incentives to assess impact and effectiveness, and to develop recommendations for a package of resources that will best support providers moving forward. Existing resources include:

  Program level resources:

  - Early Achievers Needs Based Grants: Support early learning programs participating in Early Achievers to assist with purchasing curriculum development, instructional materials, supplies, focused infant-toddler items, environmental improvements, and equipment to improve program quality.[35] Expand investment adequate funding to meet increased demand as more providers participate.
  - Early Achievers Quality Improvement Awards: Are paid to qualifying early learning programs participating in Early Achievers that have a finalized Quality Level and serve children receiving state child care subsidies.[36] These awards recognize achievement and support early learning programs to implement quality improvement goals. Expand investment to meet increased demand as more providers participate.
  - Tiered Reimbursement: Pays increased WCCC subsidy rates to programs who demonstrate quality by achieving a quality level of excellence in Early Achievers.[37]

[35] https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/ea/NBG-Overview.pdf.
[36] https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/publications-library/EPS_0074.
[37] https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/TieredReimbursementPolicy.pdf.

- Early Childhood Equity Grants: Established by the Fair Start for Kids Act, these grants support culturally and linguistically specific early learning and parent support programs across the state.[38]
- Dual Language Awards: Established by the Fair Start for Kids Act, these grants support building and/or enhancing learning environments for multilingual children.[39]
- The Complex Needs Fund: Established through the Fair Start for Kids Act, gives providers flexible funding to promote inclusive, least restrictive environments and support providers serving children with developmental delays, disabilities behavioral needs, or other unique needs.[40]

Individual ECE professional resources:

- Education Awards: Recognize and reward the educational achievements of early learning professionals.[41]
- Training Reimbursement: Support access to state-approved training for early learning professionals working in licensed child care programs.
- Scholarships: Support ECE professionals employed at Early Achievers participating facilities to pursue stackable certificates, AA, and BA degrees.[42]
- Trauma Informed Care Awards: Provide financial awards to eligible providers for completing DCYF recognized trauma informed education and training.[43]

Resources that follow the child:

- **Infant Care Rate Enhancement for WCCC:** The gap between current rates and the cost to serve infants is significantly larger than the gap for older children which contributes to the acute shortage of infant care in WA. The rate enhancement helps to offset these costs and incentivize providers to serve infants.
- **Non-Standard Hours Care Rate Enhancement for WCCC:** Helps to incentivize and offset the increased costs for providers to deliver care during non-standard hours (before 6:00am or after 6:00pm on weekdays or anytime on weekends).

[38] https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/early-learning-providers/child-care-grants/equity-grant.
[39] https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/early-learning-providers/early-achievers/dual-language-learning.
[40] https://dcyf.wa.gov/services/early-learning-providers/child-care-grants/complex-needs-fund-grant#:~:text=The%20fund%20is%20intended%20to%20promote%20inclusive%2C%20least-restrictive,delays%2C%20disabilities%2C%20behavioral%20needs%2C%20and%2For%20other%20unique%20needs.
[41] https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/About_Education_Awards.pdf.
[42] https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/earlylearning-profdev/scholarships-incentives-awards.
[43] https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/earlylearning-profdev/workforce-preparation/trauma-informed-care.

- **WCCC Special Needs Rate Supplement:** Provides critical resources for child care programs to deliver responsive care to children with a unique physical, emotional, or developmental need requiring additional staff capacity.

Maintaining and growing access to grants, enhancements, and incentives will depend upon investment by the State Legislature.

2.2.4 Improve access to specialized professional development to support ECE professionals to care for children with special needs.

- **Why this is important:** It is estimated that approximately 1 in 5 children have special needs.[44] Inclusive environments in which children with special needs are served together with children without special needs have demonstrated benefits for all children.[45] Delivering high-quality ECE opportunities for all children in inclusive settings requires specialized skills for professionals such as implementing differentiated curriculum and instruction, setting up physical environments that meet the needs of all children, and partnering with families of children with special needs.

- **How it can be implemented:** Implementation of this recommendation will begin with a planning period. This planning process should include engaging families and the ECE workforce to identify the types of special needs that additional professional development is needed for. The next step will be to conduct an inventory of existing national, state, and local resources and training currently available to determine where it is possible to build from what currently exists and where there is a need for new content creation. In building out new capacity, DCYF will engage cross sector colleagues such as DOH, OSPI, higher ed, Head Start, community-based organizations, and hospitals/ pediatricians.

2.2.5 Streamline ECE professionals' access to information and resources.

- **Why this is important:** One of the strengths of Washington's ECE system is that it includes a wide variety of professional development, training, and other resources from multiple sources that support the ECE workforce. One of the challenges is that navigating this landscape to understand what is available and find the right resource at the right time can be difficult for ECE professionals.

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[44] Maternal and Child Health Bureau, 2022. Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs: https://mchb.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/mchb/programs-impact/nsch-data-brief-children-youth-special-health-care-needs.pdf.

[45] Haring Center for Inclusive Education, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. Inclusion Benefits Everyone: https://ippdemosites.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Haring-Center-Inclusion-Research-Tip-Sheet.pdf.pdf.

- **How it can be implemented:** The first phase of implementation, which could begin as early as the 2025-27 biennium, is to initiate a human centered design process with the ECE workforce to understand current needs, pain points, and ideas for improvement. DCYF and organizations that deliver resources to support the ECE workforce should use learnings from that process to guide improvements to existing information and channels as well as consideration of potential additional information sources. It is anticipated that recommended changes would be possible to implement within existing resources and that some would likely require future investment from the State Legislature.

2.2.6 Partner with the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges and higher education institutions to increase access, navigation supports, and innovative practices to meet the needs of the diverse and growing ECE workforce.

- **Why this is important:** Skilled educators are at the heart of high-quality ECE programs that support children's healthy development and learning. Expanding access to affordable, high-quality ECE opportunities depends upon growing our state's diverse ECE workforce. Growing the ECE workforce requires multiple pathways to attain credentials (including higher education and community-based settings), adequate capacity across pathways to serve increasing numbers of ECE professionals, support for ECE professionals to efficiently navigate available options and move between them, support for participation costs, and innovative approaches to meet the unique and emerging needs of diverse communities.

  While significant work is underway in these areas, there remain gaps in currently available resources and a need to scale up as the system grows. Connections between community-based training and credit based higher education systems continues to be challenging.

- **How it can be implemented:** Scholarships are currently available to ECE professionals who are employed by Early Achievers participating facilities to pursue Washington state stackable certificates, and AA and BA degrees in ECE. Access to these resources should be scaled up to meet demand as the system grows. Work should continue to fully implement the Community-Based pathway (PACE). DCYF will work in collaboration with higher education partners to understand and address barriers to articulation with credit bearing programs and explore resources needed to help providers navigate these systems successfully.

OBJECTIVE 2.3: Increase relational health and infant and early childhood mental health supports for children and providers in diverse settings.

2.3.1 Expand mental health consultation which occurs through participation in Early Achievers and explore additional strategies to meet community needs.

- **Why this is important:** Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation partners mental health consultants with ECE providers to strengthen their ability to support the social-emotional wellbeing of children and families. Mental Health Consultation services are available to ECE programs participating in Early Achievers via the Holding Hope Program administered by Child Care Aware of Washington. These services are proven to:
    - Prevent and reduce the impact of mental health challenges to children and families.
    - Address bias and racial disparity in suspensions/expulsions.
    - Improve provider and family abilities to manage challenging behavior.

  Current caseloads of over 300 providers per mental health consultant are too high to fully realize the potential benefits of this program. Analysis of current and projected demand for services has been used to identify an ideal ratio of 100 providers per mental health consultant. The 2025 legislative session resulted in a reduction to the number of mental health consultants.

- **How it can be implemented:** Rebuilding and expansion of Holding Hope services will require investment from the State Legislature to hire additional Mental Health Consultants.

  Additional strategies to consider include:
    - Expansion of investments in ECLIPSE which is an intervention and treatment service for children birth to 5 years old.[46] It is for children and families who interact with multiple systems, including DCYF Child Welfare. In addition to daily classroom activities, families and their children enrolled in ECLIPSE receive counseling, Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health services, home visits, treatment, and other supports. Services are delivered through an integration with ECEAP, building on ECEAP services for children and families that need additional support.

[46] https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/early-learning-providers/eceap/eclipse/services.

- Preserve and scale up resources to support trauma informed care including access to training and financial awards for ECE professionals who complete training.[47]

GOAL 3: LEVERAGE DATA AND ALIGN SYSTEMS

"Overall, a better coordinated system would aim to create a seamless and individualized experience for each child, ensuring that they have access to the early care and education programs that best meet their specific needs."

—Child Care Provider Survey Respondent

[47] https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/earlylearning-profdev/workforce-preparation/trauma-informed-care.

OBJECTIVE 3.1: Ensure access to high quality data to guide decisions and increase accountability.

3.1.1 Maintain and extend DCYF's early learning data infrastructure towards a comprehensive early learning dashboard suite that is regularly updated, regionalized, and described using accessible language.

- **Why this is important:** As Washington advances recommendations to expand access to affordable, high-quality ECE opportunities for families and living wages and benefits for ECE professionals, it is essential that data is available and utilized to understand how policies and investments are responding to the needs of our state's diverse children and families and the providers that serve them. DCYF's Office of Innovation, Alignment and Accountability (OIAA), with the support of its partners, maintains an early learning dashboard suite, which includes information regarding need and supply, service uptake, and Early Achievers participation. This information summarizes the experience of all of Washington's B-5 families but is yet to include information related to access for families who are disproportionately impacted by systemic disparities.

- **How it can be implemented**: In Spring 2025, Washington STEM engaged those who have expertise in serving children**,** families, and educators, especially Indigenous, Black, People of Color, those who speak a language other than English, immigrants, those with disabilities, those who identify as LGBTQ+, and those disproportionately impacted by systemic disparities via surveys, interviews, and a workshop.[48] Washington STEM shared recommendations to inform the Early Learning Dashboard Suite and other data resources with DCYF in July 2025. Based on these findings, DCYF will update the ECE Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan to include strategies to improve the use of data to measure and increase equity in state ECE systems and OIAA tools will be reviewed for improvements. Finally, DCYF will use the updated plan and integrated data to support research and evaluation which considers access within a family's cultural context, with implications for service uptake, language access, and program outreach.

OBJECTIVE 3.2: Enable integrated and inclusive classrooms.

3.2.1 Without changing minimum licensing standards, identify and address inconsistencies and reduce contradictions across various standards and programs that are often provided in

[48] https://washingtonstem.org/.

the same setting, including but not limited to licensed child care, ECEAP, Head Start, and Transitional Kindergarten.

- **Why this is important:** The same setting (such as a K-12 school building) may house an array of programs each with different rules for things like allowable age groupings, environmental requirements, and teacher qualifications. These differences reflect varying program purposes and contexts. Seeking opportunities to streamline alignment, while respecting the unique operating environment of each program, will help to promote efficiency for ECE program operators and improved access to services for children and families.

- **How it can be implemented:** Building on existing efforts related to school age care and Transition to Kindergarten, DCYF will work with partners including Child Care Aware of Washington, School's Out Washington, OSPI, and others to identify inconsistencies and establish actionable steps for streamlining alignment while maintaining high-quality programs that support safe and healthy learning environments for children.

OBJECTIVE 3.3: Pair new resources with accountability to support high quality, anti-racist, anti-judgmental implementation of programs and resources.

3.3.1 Work to promote a culture of respect at the agency for families and ECE professionals navigating state systems.

- **Why this is important:** When families and ECE professionals interact with state agencies, it is critical that they are met with respect and focus on finding solutions that best meet their needs. Historic and current structural racism and systems of oppression can contribute to instances where bias and negative judgement sometimes arise in these interactions. This is to the detriment of children and families and contradicts DCYF's strategic goals and commitment to social justice and racial equity. DCYF staff interfacing with families and ECE professionals currently receive supplemental training beyond state required training related to working across culture as well as monitoring and coaching to support positive interactions. Anecdotal evidence suggests that customer service complaints have decreased as a result. Building upon existing staff training to continue to improve focus on promoting respectful, non-judgmental interactions between DCYF staff and families and ECE professionals will support improved child and family outcomes.

- **How it can be implemented:** DCYF has worked to better understand current user experiences through a community input process which identified what was working well and where additional training and resources for staff were needed. During the

2025-27 biennium, DCYF will continue to implement these training recommendations and resources identified in the findings.

GOAL 4: ADEQUATE FACILITIES FOR EXPANSION OF THE EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION SYSTEM

"I think just what we were just talking about with playground accessibility, building accessibility, all of that to support children with complex medical and developmental needs. I mean it's just having the proper equipment and materials. [But] looking in any catalog for equipment to support children with special needs, I mean, it's thousands upon thousands, upon thousands of dollars. So, we've purchased it on an as need base basis for children when they're here, but it's expensive."

—Child Care Provider Focus Group Participant (ELF Recipient)

OBJECTIVE 4.1: Maximize capital budget investments in the Early Learning Facilities (ELF) program.[49]

4.1.1 Expand ELF grants, loans, and technical assistance for eligible early learning programs to meet health and safety requirements, preserve existing capacity, and expand access.

- **Why this is important:** The cost to renovate or expand facilities is a significant barrier for ECE programs which are already struggling to maintain day-to-day operations in an extremely resource-constrained environment. The Early Learning Facilities (ELF) program administered by the Department of Commerce in partnership with DCYF helps Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) contractors and WCCC providers to expand, remodel, purchase, or construct early learning facilities and classrooms necessary to support early learning opportunities for children from low-income households. Since its inception in 2017, the ELF Fund has retained and/or created an estimated 17,600 early learning slots and has leveraged $274.4 million in non-state resources.[50] Technical assistance supports equitable language access to the program as well as navigating becoming a licensed provider.

- **How it can be implemented:** Demand for ELF resources currently exceeds current investment and the need for facilities will continue to increase as the roll out of the child care guarantee progresses. Further, as ELF program demand increases so does the need for DCYF to provide technical assistance to participants. Preservation and expansion of ELF program resources will require continued and increased investments from the State Legislature. Recommendations for future biennium investments should be based upon the work of the Early Learning Facilities Plan described in objective 4.2.

OBJECTIVE 4.2: Explore and implement new approaches to meet the long-term facilities needs to scale access for children and families as identified in the early learning facilities plan currently under development which will be available in June 2026.

4.2.2 Resource and implement a comprehensive strategy for expanding early learning facilities maintenance and development with robust support services, based on lessons learned from other sectors as well as existing programs and pilots.

- **Why this is important:** As investments are made to support universal access to early care and education, it is critical that DCYF understand the needs for early learning facilities and current barriers to inform a strategic, phased-in approach to ensuring adequate facilities to meet current and emerging demand for ECE services.

[49] https://www.commerce.wa.gov/capital-facilities/elf/.
[50] Start Early Washington, 2024: Capital Budget Request: https://www.startearly.org/app/uploads/2021/05/ELF-Ask-Document-12.2.24.pdf.

DCYF has engaged BERK Consulting to collect and analyze data and develop recommendations for an early learning facilities plan. Data collection and analysis will examine a broad range of issues such as:

- Interplay between different zoning regulations that impact ECE providers.
- ECE provider readiness and pre-construction needs.
- Options for systemizing a process for identifying existing space that may be available.
- Modeling the funding necessary to renovate or convert existing spaces to meet licensing requirements.
- Exploring the impact of declining K-12 enrollment on facilities availability.
- Analyzing the unique needs of rural communities.
- Understanding ECE providers' financial risks and identifying mitigation strategies to address those risks.

- **How it can be implemented:** The Early Learning Facilities Plan is scheduled to be completed by June of 2026. As this work is directly connected to the ECE Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan, recommendations from the facilities plan will be integrated into future updates of the ECE Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan.

CONCLUSION

The ECE Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan charts a clear, phased path toward building a more accessible, equitable, and sustainable early care and education system over the 10 years following a preparatory period to lay the groundwork. It builds upon the strong foundation of efforts to date and reflects the priorities and perspectives of communities across the state. The Implementation Plan provides DCYF a roadmap that centers the child care guarantee and provider's living wages as the foundation of a flourishing Washington State economy. Both the timing and scale of the strategies outlined in the Implementation Plan are dialable and can be adjusted to reflect our state's evolving fiscal context. Many of the strategies included in the Plan require a discovery or mapping period as a first step, these are areas where progress can be made in the early years of implementation despite the current challenges in the fiscal environment. Future updates to the Implementation Plan will include cost estimates and projections for expansion.

By focusing on access and affordability for families, living wages and benefits for ECE workers, strategic program alignment and use of data, and expanded facilities, the plan addresses long-standing systemic issues that continues to limit access to high quality child care in Washington. Success will require dedicated capacity within DCYF to drive the work forward and measure

progress, continued collaboration with communities and partners, and sustained commitment from the State Legislature.

Ultimately, the ECE Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan recognizes that early care and education is foundational to the state's economic stability, children's healthy development, and community well-being.

For questions regarding the ECE Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan, please contact DCYF's Government Affairs team at dcyf.govaffairs@dcyf.wa.gov.

APPENDICES

Washington State Department of CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

- **Appendix A: ECE Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan Status Update**
  Released in the fall of 2024, the Status Update provided a snapshot of efforts to date to develop the ECE Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan including need, the process for developing the Plan, near term policy recommendations, and preliminary high-level long-term policy recommendations. https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/Implementation-Plan-Status-Update-Report.pdf

- **Appendix B: 2024 DCYF Cost of Quality Child Care and Market Rate Study**
  The study contains economic survey data and analysis regarding the cost of quality licensed child care and the child care market in Washington state that will drive provider reimbursement for subsidized child care. In addition to studying market rates, this year's study also utilizes a Cost Estimation Model to analyze the true cost for licensed child care centers and family homes to provide high quality child care in Washington.
  https://dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/reports/ChildCareMarketRateStudy2024.pdf

- **Appendix C: Breaking Down: The Economic Cost of Child Care Disruptions in Washington**
  Report prepared by Eco Northwest for Child Care Aware of Washington presenting findings on the economic impact of child care disruptions on parents, businesses that employ parents, and the broader economy. https://childcareforwa.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Breaking-Down_The-Economic-Cost-of-Child-Care-Disruptions-in-Washington.pdf

- **Appendix D**: **Summary of Existing Efforts to Expand Access and Support the ECE Workforce**
  Washington has made substantial progress in recent years to improve access and affordability for families and support the ECE workforce. This progress includes both efforts to understand the scope of the problem and explore possible solutions and improved policies and investments to begin to address the needs of Washington's children and families and the ECE professionals who serve them. https://dcyf.box.com/s/l903tni3b13we80o49wydj0hn2z81eqh
  This document summarizes these efforts including:
  - Fair Start for Kids Act
  - Child Care Collaborative Task Force
  - Cost of Quality Care Rate Model
  - DCYF Racial Equity and Social Justice Framework
  - Preschool Development Plan Birth to Five
  - Early Learning Coordination Plan
  - Early Achievers

- **Appendix E: Policies and Investments to Increase Child Care Access and Compensation: A Scan of National and State Examples**
  The policy scan was completed in the Spring of 2024 to inform efforts to develop the ECE Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan. It explores examples of policy and investment strategies to expand access to early care and education and improve workforce compensation that may provide insights and considerations for Washington as the state works to develop the Early Care and Education Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan. Policy strategies included are recent changes to federal CCDF rules, recommendations from national organizations, efforts by other states, and implementation of the $10-a day child care plan in Canada. https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/Policies-Investments-Increase-Child-Care-Access-Comp.pdf

- **Appendix F: Early Care & Education Access and Living Wage Proviso Report: Summary of Findings from Listening Sessions & Survey Responses from Child Care Providers and Families with Children Ages Brith through Age 12**
  DCYF contracted with Washington Communities for Children (WCFC) to conduct outreach to families and providers across the state to inform the development of the ECE Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan. In total, 293 individuals participated in listening sessions and 134 individuals participated in an online survey. The report details the findings from the survey and focus groups. https://www.washingtoncfc.org/reports-publications

- **Appendix G: Early Care and Education Access and Living Wage Proviso: Engagement Feedback Summary**
  This document provides a summary of the identified themes from the engagement conducted by DCYF throughout 2024. In addition to listening sessions and surveys conducted by Washington Communities for Children, DCYF solicited feedback from the Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC), the Washington Childcare Center Association (WCCA), the Provider Supports Subcommittee, the Indian Policy of Learning (IPEL), KinderCare, School's Out Washington, DCYF staff, and licensed providers.
  https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/Access-Living-Wage-Engagement-Findings.pdf

- **Appendix H: Child Care for Washington Policy Platform**
  Child Care for Washington is a campaign to make Washington's high-quality, mixed-delivery ECE programs accessible and affordable for all families and to ensure living wages and benefits for the ECE workforce. The Policy Platform is the campaign's long-term vision for child care in Washington, building on the foundation of existing efforts including the Fair Start for Kids Act and ECEAP entitlement. It was developed following a coordinated community engagement

process conducted in the first half of 2024. https://childcareforwa.org/policy-resources/policy-platform/