



WASHINGTON
COMMUNITIES
for CHILDREN



Early Learning Community Outreach SUMMARY REPORT

Inland Northwest

Prepared for the
Washington State Early Learning Plan Needs Assessment

Data gathered September/October 2019

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Background & Methodology

In 2018, Washington State was awarded the federal Preschool Development Birth Through Five Grant (PDG). The funding was allocated to the Department of Children Youth and Families (DCYF) to facilitate collaboration and coordination among existing programs of early childhood care and education. As part of the grant, DCYF partnered with stakeholders to conduct a comprehensive statewide birth through five needs assessment, followed by an in-depth strategic plan. The full strategic plan is still under development.

The Washington Communities for Children (WCFC) regions partnered with DCYF in the fall of 2019 to gather feedback for the Needs Assessment. In a one-month period, WCFC collectively hosted 90 listening sessions and gathered input from 931 diverse participants across Washington State. Types of providers interviewed included families, child care providers, social service organizations, early intervention providers, home visitors, school districts, play and learn groups, and others.

Every comment from every participant was reviewed and “coded” based on the five categories in the Strategic Organizing Framework. This framework was developed in collaboration with the project Steering Committee. The Framework will be used as the organizing structure for the Needs Assessment and the development of a statewide Strategic Plan. The five categories in the Strategic Organizing Framework include the following:

- **Powerful Communities & Responsive Early Learning System**
- **Healthy Children & Families**
- **Positive Early Learning Experiences**
- **Strong & Stable Families**
- **Supported Early Learning Workforce**

In addition, some comments from participants were coded as “Cross-Cutting” because they reflected overarching themes that transcend any of the five Framework categories.



Background & Methodology (continued)

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

This report outlines the Needs Assessment results from the WCFC interviews, specifically from the **Inland Northwest Region**.



Data Sources



Meetings Conducted

- 3 group meetings
- 7 group meetings where participants individually filled out forms
- 1 interview with an executive

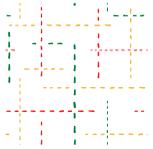
Total Participants



- **Self-reported race and ethnicity** (NOTE: Only 10 of 64 participants reported)



- **Hosts/Groups included:** ECEAP Parents, Parkview Early Learning Staff, Southwest Community Center ECEAP Staff, Partners with Families and Children – parents, Deer Park Branch Library, Medical Lake Branch Library, Children’s Home Society Home Visiting Professionals of Spokane Valley, Refugee Connections of Spokane, Spokane Lilac City Early Learning, Spokane Journey Discovery Center
- **Respondent composition:** A mixture of early learning professionals, parents and caregivers, with a majority of respondents being parents and caregivers.



Cross-Cutting Issues

Availability of Services (15 comments) & Affordability (13 comments)

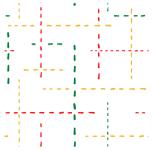
Several commented on the overall need for more child-care; in particular there was interest in more affordable child-care options; more availability for middle-income families who neither qualify for subsidies nor can afford private child-care; and some mentioned interest in more choices in schedule or model (e.g., Montessori, etc.).

“Should be a tiered expense system - rather than all or nothing for, example given that someone might not take a raise because they would lose their child-care benefits”

Accessing Services – 13 comments

Participants expressed concern about the range of requirements – age, income, etc. – that made it hard to access given services.

“There is strict [criteria] for some programs, a parent could be denied help, but still need it for their child, they don’t get the help they need simply because they don’t hit bench marks”



Cross-Cutting Issues (continued)

Immigrant and Refugee (13 comments) & Language and Cultural Competence (11 comments)

There was widespread call for the system doing more to respect and support youth and families who primarily speak other languages – including viewing a second language by student and parents as “a capacity for language” rather than a “burden” or a “stigma;” a more flexible system (rather than EL for 2 years for everyone); and more training for staff in cultural competence to avoid cases where “misinterpreting behavior... can lead to label behavior issues that are not accurate.”

“When working with refugees and language – the system focuses on lack of English in the home. They should embrace the value of knowing/ communicating in 2 languages.”

Equity/Inequity/Diversity/Inclusion/Disparities/Disproportionality (11 comments)

Many of these concerns were around issues of mistreatment of immigrant, refugees and English Language Learners (discussed above). Other comments acknowledged that there were systems where money helped – better access to better services; and that there needs to be an inclusive process for changing the system.

“The topic of Early Learning is a charged topic cuz it reflects state funding priorities...Also important is engaging the demographic of people related to early learning...This touches on issues of injustice, distribution.”



Powerful Communities and Responsive Early Learning System



Better Coordination of Services and Supports (26 comments)

There was recognition of strong local partner agencies, but concern about duplication and the system was described as “broken” and “disconnected. There were calls to “have all information in one place,” “easier access to services for birth-3”; and better connection between teachers and those doing diagnosis.

“All programs and all services that serve children would be connected.”

Need for System Financing/Sustainability/Additional Funding Sources (15 comments)

There was widespread interest in more funding for the general support of centers (particularly low-income) and services; for staff (both for compensation and to support training and accreditation); and for serving children with special needs.

“I would add more support/resources, after all these are the most important years



Healthy Children and Families

Food Security and Nutrition (27 comments)

Food and nutrition generally came up in two ways: (1) When discussing how parents support their child's development, parents often mentioned a healthy diet. (2) When asked who they rely on, several mentioned both "WIC" and "food banks."

"Encourage her to eat health, limit sugar and drink fluids"

Physical Health (Pediatricians and Medical Providers) (15 comments)

Similar to food and nutrition, this came up in two ways: (1) Many parents mentioned they support their child's development through doctor visits (and vaccinations, "well-child visits," etc.); and (2) many mentioned pediatrician or physical therapy as local resources that they rely on.

"Regular trips to her pediatrician, weekly physical therapy, regular trips to the dentist and a healthy diet."

Positive Learning Experiences



Informal Activities (29 comments)

Discussion of informal activities coursed through comments – families mentioned the importance of supporting their children with free play and outside time, church, attending church, family time, reading, visiting the library – including story time, and sports (football, hockey). At the same time, many parents, when asked for what they'd want to offer their children, also mentioned more of these- more time, more organized activities, more chance to play with other children.

[If cost & availability were no barrier, where would you want your child to spend their day?]

"To experience the world and having new experiences, museums with me."

K-12 System (25 comments)

School came up most often as the answer to where children spent their days, and as important to parents as a source of information and for their children's education ("school because learning is good"). While several expressed their happiness with the teachers in their school, a few parents expressed that with no barriers of cost or availability, they would send their child to private school.

[If cost & availability were no barrier, where would you want your child to spend their day?]

"Right where she is. I couldn't ask for better educators."

Positive Learning Experiences (continued)



Non-Licensed Child Care (17 comments), Licensed Child Care (16 comments), Parental Choice/Family Engagement (13 comments)

Across the responses it was clear that many parents rely on a wide variety of child-care arrangements, including public and private day care, parents and friends, and babysitters for intermittent care – while others are struggling to find the right care because of accessibility, affordability or challenges navigating the system. At the same time, several parents choose to keep their young children at home for a variety of reasons (reduce travel, “savor the early years,” “she is not comfortable with day care,” etc.).

“One of the mothers has her little at home but commented that that her other kids attended preschool.”

Special Education / Special Needs Children (11 comments)

It was clear across parents, providers, and administrators that there is a need for more resources for children with special needs and their families – more training for staff, more resources for programs, more favorable staffing ratios in classrooms, and more support for parents.

“Biggest challenge is adapting to special needs children, their needs are challenging. Had a student with autism and had to go to Google to get information on how to help this child.”





Strong & Stable Families

Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development (26 comments)

Parents discussed many ways they support their child, including medical care, nutrition, good sleep habits, exercise and spending quality time “listening to them and being there to protect and support them.” A few discussed benefiting from parenting classes or home visitors; and others expressed they would like to learn more about “non-academic milestones” or how to prepare their child for kindergarten.

“I love watching my children turn into their own individual. Watching them grow physically, emotionally and mentally is so amazing.”

Kinship Care/Extended Families (25 comments)

Quite simply, families rely on a wide and varied network of friends and family members for their child care – spouses, “grandma,” siblings, older children, friends, ex-spouses, and more.

“With Aunt three days a week, one day a week with mom, one day with day[care] (mom works so this is Monday - Friday) commented she’d like her child to be around other kids”



Strong & Stable Families (continued)

Overall Family Stability (18 comments) and Family Economic Needs (9 comments)

Parents shared that balancing the needs of work, childcare, family and home were a struggle and they needed simply more time, more support (cleaning, dishes, etc.), or other relief. Several families simply mentioned that more money (“a million dollars”), help paying bills, or more savings would help.

“This mom works, home by 6, then dinner, bath – all in an hour or an hour and a half – and says her life feels like the movie ‘Groundhog Day.’”

Parental Resilience (11 comments) & Social Connections/Isolation (3 comments)

Several parents mentioned that their networks, friends and family help them “stay sane,” including a few who specifically mentioned Narcotics Anonymous “sponsors.” Others mentioned the desire for a chance to talk to other parents in some informal group, and one mentioned relying on a “mom’s group.”

“I think having a group of parents to talk to and meet up with would make parenting a little easier.”



Supported Early Learning Workforce



Professional Development/Training/Coaching/Resources Needed (31 comments)

There was widespread interest – from teachers, parents, administrators – in more training both in general and specifically for dealing with behavior issues/“difficult children,” children with special needs, and with immigrants and English language learners. Many teachers relied heavily on their co-workers and supervisors for help and information. Several expressed that there should be more support if teachers are required to take classes.

“I think we need more trainings and more tools to do the job you want to do for the kids and the job you want to do.”

Staffing capacity / turnover (23 comments) & staffing levels (12 comments)

In a variety of ways, teachers expressed interest in having more staffing capacity to provide better attention to the children: “better ratios,” “more planning time,” “more substitutes,” “smaller class sizes.”

“Lower the ratio of children to one teacher so more quality time is spent with the children.”

Compensation/Wages/Benefits/Incentives (17 comments)

It’s quite clear that early learning providers take pride in the importance of their work and the care and commitment they bring, but also that they feel their work needs more compensation (“a living wage,” “equal pay”) and other support (e.g., “paid family leave”)

“Resources are not allocated appropriately, there is a major lack of understanding from law makers as to what is considered realistic for teachers to accomplish. It is not treated as a respected career even though early education affects so many areas and levels of our society.”



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