



WASHINGTON
COMMUNITIES
for CHILDREN



Early Learning Community Outreach SUMMARY REPORT

Investing in Children Coalition

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, Safe, Nurturing, and Supported 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.



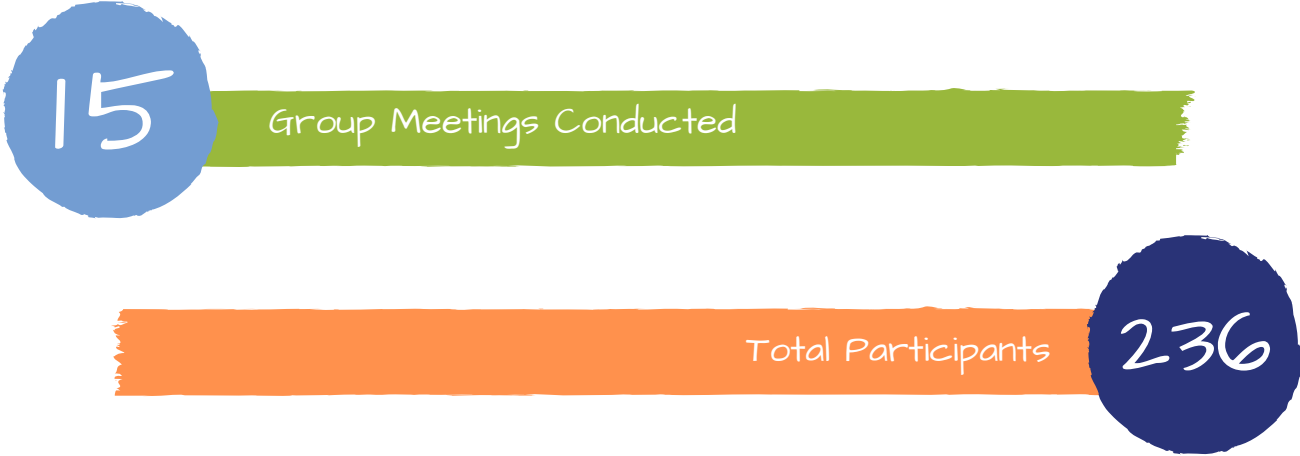
Background & Methodology (continued)

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 **Investing in Children Coalition**.



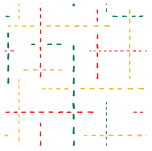
Data Sources



- **Self-reported race and ethnicity** (NOTE: Only 147 of 236 participants reported)



- **Hosts/Groups included:** Family Home Providers, Children’s Village, Parent Support Groups for Autism Support and Down Syndrome, Investing in Children Coalition Meeting, ESD 105 Early Learning Staff, Head Start Parent Policy Council, EPIC Staff, Nuestra Casa, ESD 105 Professional Community Members, Kittitas County Early Learning Coalition Board Meeting, Yakima ECLIPSE, and at Cristo Rey, Rio de Vida, and Gonzaga Townhomes Farmworker & Workforce Housing.
- **Respondent composition:** A mixture of early learning professionals, parents and caregivers with the majority of respondents being parents and caregivers.



Cross-Cutting Issues

Accessing Services (45 comments)

Concerns about access largely came up for three main reasons – (1) the number of requirements some programs; (2) actual difficulty for some families to engage with programs (because of transportation, schedule, can't reach program on phone, etc.); and (3) the concern about income cliff leaving many working families with no option for child care.

"Very hard to access quality early learning and childcare. Most preschools are half day which does not work for working parents. Also, preschool & quality childcare is expensive and many families cannot afford it."

Availability of Services (29 comments) & Affordability of Services (27 comments)

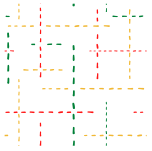
There was a general need for more affordable programming to meet the need – more services (e.g., speech therapy), more child care (at lowest income levels and for lower-income for "families that do not qualify"), more programs focusing under 3 years old, and more home visiting slots "matching community need."

"Funds are available but it never seems enough. There are many children not serviced [in] poverty needing child care."

Language and Cultural Competence (29 comments)

Language comes up primarily in three ways: (1) a wish for more services to non-English speakers ("no one speaks Spanish"), (2) an interest in cultural activities connected to their community, and (3) parents interest in their children and themselves learning English.

"I would like there to be cultural activities that are accessible for the kids. Places or organizations that have recreational and educational activities that are close to the community."



Cross-Cutting Issues (continued)

Equity/Inequity/Diversity/Inclusion/Disparities/Disproportionality (25 comments)

Several structural inequalities were mentioned by parents and providers concerned with an “EL system for some kids, not all” –“subsidy rate disparities,” differences in “urban vs rural” (details not specified), language access, “families who don’t have the web.”

“Building on and strengthening our community rather than separating families/cultures from the dominant culture”



Powerful Communities and Responsive Early Learning System



Better Coordination of Services and Supports (103 comments)

There were a variety of opinions expressed about coordination – some stated “there is a lot of resources that can help”, while others found the system “disjointed and variable” or even asked “what EL system?”. Many times, coordination came up as people mentioned having partners at all levels (e.g. DCYF and DOH at state level; Catholic Charities or Children’s Village locally).

“Yes, there is a lot of organizations that help me with information and resources and for my job it is a lot of help.”

“There is very little organizations that I know that I can refer but I always try to look in the school district, in clinics and in community events.”

Need for System Financing/Sustainability/Additional Funding Sources (40 comments)

The general sentiment came from providers stating early learning needed more funding, particularly for “sustainability...not just expansion of services” and to support a workforce that is “passionate with limited resources.” There were some specific requests/concerns about funding that it was “complex,” had “multiple requirements & demands,” and should “put the dollars upfront.”

“Early learning care is aligned with economic development, and the health & well-being of children. Funding is inadequate and additional rules/laws continue to pile on. Systematic changes are needed to meet the growing demand for early learning providers.”

Powerful Communities and Responsive Early Learning System (continued)



Referrals / Help Me Grow (25 comments)

With mentions of “no wrong door,” there was repeated interest in “central access point” or “universal tracking and referral system” that “explains all early learning services and how they can be accessed,” including recognition of help me grow and request for “funding to make Help Me Grow a reality.”

“It would help if there was a central location where families could get access to resources. Finding ways to simplify and make less opaque”





Healthy Children and Families

Food Security and Nutrition (71 comments)

Like with physical health, nutrition came up primarily from parents who discuss “feeding... healthy food,” as part of how they support their child and many mentioned relying on WIC and food banks for food. A few asked for more help – to “have more help with nourishment, and for the food banks to give more.”

“I feed him with healthy foods so he can have all the vitamins necessary for his growth.”

Physical Health (Pediatricians and Medical Providers) (91 comments)

Parents primarily discussed physical health and visiting doctors as one aspect of how they support their child’s growth. In addition, both parents and providers mentioned medical providers as valued partners in supporting children’s health. Some families discussed need with more “access to health[care]”.

“I take care of her and I take her to all her medical appointments. I follow the protocol that the doctor indicates for her development and growth. I try to make sure that she is happy and that she gets fed well.”

“I feel secure taking my kids to the clinic. I go to clinics for health check-ups. I feel safe because they help me with my doubts.”



Healthy Children and Families (continued)

Mental Health (24 comments)

This came up both in reliance on mental health providers (“family therapy”), a need for more services for families and more support for staff – “extra support for EL staff who are working with clients who are experiencing significant issues.”

["What's needed?"]

“More resources for mental health, money for training for classroom staff to support children behavior in classroom/family support.”

Comprehensive Care / Integrated Care (23 comments)

Both providers and families discussed the wide range of services and partners that they relied on, “we heavily rely on agencies to support families,” listing private and public agencies dealing with a wide range of issues including health, housing, education, therapy, food and financial support and more.

“We use community services to help the whole family. If there is a need that needs to be met, we can help them find places within the Valley to get what is needed. We also have partnerships with the school districts to help transition our kids.”



Positive Learning Experiences



Informal Activities (113 comments)

Informal activities covered a wide range of activities (playing in parks, games at home, sports and art classes, church groups, museums, and libraries, etc.) were repeatedly brought up by parents and caregivers both as an important element in supporting their child’s development and a stated wish for more (lack of programs or lack of money, time, transportation to access).

“I would like to spend most of my time with her and go to places like the zoo, places to play, and other places that do not charge. I would like to take her to the museum, on family trips, educational events, etc.”

K - 12 System (80 comments)

Schools came up as important both for parents – who value and rely on schools to take care and educate their children for large parts of each day - and for providers who frequently mentioned schools as important service partners.

“Being in school that teaches them social skills and academically.”

“We have several community partnerships as well as we work closely with school districts.”

Positive Learning Experiences (continued)



Parental Choice / Family Engagement (53 comments)

Parents are engaged in a wide variety of choices to juggle child care, child education, work responsibilities and more expressed a range of solutions, including relying on parents and friends; schools; day care because “being at home too much was difficult;” and choosing to stay home “because I do not trust leaving them with other people.”

[Written by interviewer] “Home with mother - described using childcare for her older children and now that she is able to stay home with her youngest, ‘I see the value... I messed up my first 4 kids... better bond with this child.’”

Licensed Child Care (41 comments) and Non-Licensed Child Care (38 comments)

Quite simply, parents rely on both non-licensed child care options (family, neighbors, babysitters) and licensed child-care options and there is a stated need for more – and with more flexibility to meet their needs (“evenings, nights, week-ends, holidays”).

“Home with grandparents because of the lack of childcare (long wait lists) and the lack of affordable childcare.





Strong & Stable Families

Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development (97 comments)

Primarily, parents showed an understanding of parenting and child development through their multi-faceted strategies for care – including play, reading and instruction, nutrition, medical checkups, and limiting screen time. In addition, there were some parents receiving – and others asking – for additional “help with the development of my kids” or “activities for the kids’ depending on their age.” Several caregivers also expressed the reward that came from helping parents learn new knowledge and skills for their child’s development.

“Provide for more capacity for families with children birth to two to positively impact their developing brains when it is most important.”

Kinship Care/Extended Families (39 comments)

Parents rely on an array of family members to ensure child care, including “close friends and relatives” spouses and ex-spouses, partners, grandparents and more. In some cases it is by choice; others out of necessity (nothing else affordable/available); while others see family childcare as part of a patchwork: a kid may spend time with “the school, my mom, my brothers in law, and the program play and learn.”

“I have people within my family that I can trust to take care of my son.”

“Home with grandparents because of the lack of childcare (long wait lists) and the lack of affordable childcare.”



Strong & Stable Families (continued)

Overall Family Stability/Families in Crisis (39 comments)

Many parents are proud of the hard work and their ability to support their families, and yet there is also a desire for more help – more time, more money, “work less so I can spend more time with my kids,” “a housekeeper,” help with “small daily tasks; “time management,” “financial management,” and simply “respite.”

“Have more time with the kids, work less, have support in the house to be able to take the responsibility.”

Social Connection/Isolation (40 comments)

Parents rely on a range of formal and informal gatherings as a “support system” or an “opportunity to interact with other people”; including several mentions of Children’s Village, Parent 2 Parent, Facebook, religious groups, and MOPS (Mothers of Pre-Schoolers).

“MOPS – likes because there is childcare and the parents have time to talk with each other and drink hot coffee and not have to share their food with their child throughout the visit.”



Supported Early Learning Workforce



Professional Development/Training/Coaching/Resources Needed (73 comments)

Providers clearly value current training and link it to their ability to serve families and “do it professionally”; and there is interest in more time, money (funding and scholarships) and availability for trainings on a wide range of topics: “about technology,” “on special needs”, “for EL professionals,” more to serve “the fathers of the family.”

“That I can help the families take care of their kids. That the kids gain more education. It helps to go to various trainings where I prepare to implement the kids care and to give the kids a better quality.”

Early Achievement Requirements (32 comments)

Many providers clearly view Early Achievers positively (“I feel comfortable to ask the people at Early Achievers”, “We can count on the Early Achievers program.. to prepare us.”), yet there are request for “clear and simplified regulations,” and understanding “the difference between the providers. It is not the same as a school.”

“I would add for the Early Achievers, licensors, and providers to work together. I would add for the licensor to be more consistent with the providers (visit every 18 months). I would like there to be more communication between licensors and providers.”

Supported Early Learning Workforce (continued)



Licensing/WAC/ECEAP standards (30 comments)

There clearly wish for more training or consistency by licensors, since some feel that “everyone has a different opinion” and there is a desire from providers for it to “be the same way each time.” Several expressed a wish for licensors to “consider that a home care is different than a center of care” and “more flexibility so the kid can be a kid in a freer environment.”

“I would change the way the revisions that the licensors do so it can be the same way each time and they do not use their criteria.”

“To not compare with the centers because a home is different and it should feel like a home. There is a lot of stress because of the change of routines and the areas are smaller.”

Cost of doing business (28 comments)

Providing child care is hard and providers would like more financial support – for more training, for more scholarships (for both teacher training and child enrollment) and more basically, need support for “materials for the kids learning.”

“Overworked and underpaid (high demand + low wage). Early learning care is aligned with economic development, and the health & well-being of children. Funding is inadequate and additional rules/laws continue to pile on. Systematic changes are needed to meet the growing demand for early learning providers.”





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