



WASHINGTON
COMMUNITIES
for CHILDREN



Early Learning Community Outreach SUMMARY REPORT

King County Early Learning Coalition

Summer 2020

Prepared for the
Washington State Early Learning Plan Needs Assessment

The data is drawn from previously compiled reports and coded to align with the Strategic Organizing Framework.

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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.

Unlike other regional reports, this project draws from reports produced in King County that capture outreach, surveys, focus groups and in depth conversations on early learning and care. These reports were reviewed and major themes were identified 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 **King County Early Learning Coalition**.

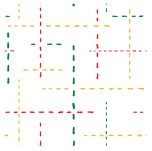


Data Sources



Please Note:

Unlike other regional reports, this project draws from reports produced in King County that capture outreach, surveys, focus groups and in depth conversations on early learning and care. These reports were reviewed and major themes were identified and “coded” based on the five categories in the Strategic Organizing Framework.



Cross-Cutting Issues

Affordability

There were several discussions of the fact that childcare and preschool costs are a burden for families and often unaffordable. As part of this, there were concerns about working families who do not qualify for free or subsidized care but also can't afford private childcare.

"It would be helpful if the Washington State assistance that is helping to pay for childcare and other supportive financial resources be available without making the family hit rock bottom in order to be eligible."

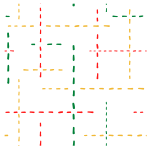
- Parent of King County (The Black Family Voice Project)

Accessing Services

Accessing services is a challenge for families, particularly marginalized communities. Several found it difficult to access services only available during "work hours," and there was interest in services at nights, weekends, or 24/7 by phone. Accessing childcare is also a challenge, including concerns about eligibility requirements and having limited options for nights and weekends.

"Acknowledging that parents/caregivers experiencing poverty/homelessness makes accessing these services so much harder and therefore makes it feel incredibly challenging and demoralizing when trying to get the needed support for our child's development. There is privilege in being able to find services available in a way that is conducive to things like having a job with uncertain hours and not having reliable transportation or stable housing. It's exhausting trying to navigate all of the service requirements that are piled on top of an already hoop-jumping, barrier-enabled system. When trying to get to all of the services that the whole family needs, it gets overwhelming and easily feels impossible to stay on track and be a good parent to everyone else."

- Focus group participant (Prenatal to Five Developmental Screening, Referral, And Connection to Services in King County)



Cross-Cutting Issues (continued)

Language and Cultural Competence

Several of the documents mentioned a widespread need for more and more varied services in more languages and with more attention to cultural competence. There were concerns about the limited availability of developmental screening in other languages, fewer library books and programs available, fewer culturally relevant programs for youth and a lack of support for ELL students in K-12 system along with comments of the need for more training and sensitivity by providers. Families appreciate service providers that share their identities and “family navigators” have proven helpful for some.

“I prefer asking a health professional especially if it is someone that looks like me and speaks the same language preferably because sometimes they understand what we want to convey since they are familiar with the culture”

- Southeast Seattle participant (What Are Parents and Caregivers Telling Us?; Findings from Maternal Support Services Engagement, Spring 2018)

“Any written tool, even if it might be in their home language, might not be culturally responsive, especially for a culture that may prefer to do things orally. It’s a very middle class, white, American thing to do to give someone a piece of paper to fill out.”

- Early learning provider (Prenatal to Five Developmental Screening, Referral, And Connection to Services in King County)

Equity/Inequity/Diversity/Inclusion/Disparities/Disproportionality

Several communities brought up concerns that there were not appropriate services to meet their families’ needs, including a wish for specialized support to deal with history of discrimination and colonization and less negative labeling of black children. One way identified to have non-judgmental services, was to have staff people who have similar lived experiences.

“Too many of the negative experiences that happened to us are still happening to our children a generation later.”

(The Black Family Voice Project)

Powerful Communities and Responsive Early Learning System



Better Coordination of Services and Supports

There were lots of concerns about the lack of coordination between the systems and services that families must navigate – namely between schools, health and medical providers, and social services. This concern was particularly acute for those transitioning out of Birth to Three services. Some expressed interest in co-location of services at locations such as WIC clinics, community centers, doctor’s offices or libraries.

“Connection between healthcare and social service providers is needed. They are really silo’d. There seems to be a disconnect between mental health and primary health providers and social service providers.”

- Early learning provider (Prenatal to Five Developmental Screening, Referral, And Connection to Services in King County)

Business and Employers

Several parents discussed how lack of flexibility or lack of support from employers made working and pregnancy or having a new child harder, including loss of pay during maternity leave, inflexible work hours that did not match child care availability and lack of support during pregnancy.



Healthy Children and Families

Maternal and Family Health / Expectant Families

Parents identified a wide range of services, trainings and supports that would help during pregnancy and early childhood, including access to mental health supports (both group and individual counseling) to deal with stress and post-partum depression, breastfeeding support, healthy diet and exercise during pregnancy and preparation for delivery.

"My first pregnancy I did not know what to do. I followed what other people told me to do but I never knew if it was true or not... I would have liked more information on how to help the health of my baby and I."

– Kirkland-Spanish participant (What Are Parents and Caregivers Telling Us?: Findings from Maternal Support Services Engagement, Spring 2018)

Physical Health (Pediatricians and Medical Providers)

Parents clearly relied on health care providers, with some medical providers being relied on as a source of emotional support outside the family, and many discussing positive experiences. In what survey, many caregivers mentioned health care providers as a key source of information on children's health and development. They wanted providers who were emotionally supportive, with some parents reporting that they felt judged, disrespected, or concerned about the risk of providers calling Child Protective Services.

"I prefer asking a health professional especially if it is someone that looks like me and speaks the same language preferably because sometimes they understand what we want to convey since they are familiar with the culture."

– Southeast Seattle participant (What Are Parents and Caregivers Telling Us?: Findings from Maternal Support Services Engagement, Spring 2018)



Healthy Children and Families (continued)

Developmental Screening

Providers expressed widespread support for and use of screening for developmental and behavioral concerns, (using varied practices) and many parents have heard of screening at birth from their doctors. But there are gaps in referral and follow up practices. There was also widespread concern about needing appropriate screening tools for families of different races, cultures, and linguistic backgrounds.

“Developmental screening is very important. On a scale from 1 – 10, it’s an 11! We know that early intervention is better than remediation later. Identifying children in the community earlier and connecting them to services earlier has a whole host of [positive] outcomes”.

- Policy/ESIT expert (Prenatal to Five Developmental Screening, Referral, And Connection to Services in King County)

Food Security and Nutrition

Parents reported that food support was insufficient to meet families’ needs, and that they some run out of food by the end of the month. Homeless families were particularly challenged, because of trouble storing food. There was interest in better access to a food pantry as co-located with other services.



Positive Learning Experiences



Informal Activities

Many parents and caregivers read and sing to their children on a regular basis, and see the library as a key resource – although there is a wish for more books and other resources in languages other than English. Some black parents expressed concern about feeling that some informal activities (play groups, story times, gym activities) were not welcoming.

“There are no resources in Spanish. Families need books in their first language to be able to read with their children.”

– Latina caregivers (Best Start for Kids Survey Data Brief. How are King County Caregivers building Strong Attachments by Reading, Singing, and Telling Stories with their Children? July 2018)

“Storytime at the library and gym for infants but we just didn’t feel connected.”

– Parent of King County (The Black Family Voice Project)

Supportive and Seamless Transitions

Parents and caregivers expressed anxiety about the transition into kindergarten, particularly black parents concerned with negative labeling for the parent and child; unjust school discipline, and not feeling welcomed at school and AIAN parents whose concerns included overall adjustment, lack of cultural fit, behavioral adjustment, and lack of ability of school staff to build relationships. There was also general concern about transition of evaluations, information and services leaving birth to three.

“[For AIAN], I think it’s harder for them to start school because they’ve got to really understand what they’re getting into, and that starts at home, I think, with the parents and the elder people...help them get motivated and ready for school physically and mentally, spiritually...I think that’s the best idea to start in the home so they carry that attitude when they come to the preschool atmosphere, or kindergarten.”

(United Indians of All Tribes Foundation; Ina Maka Family Program; Community Needs & Readiness Assessment 2017)

Positive Learning Experiences (continued)



Supportive and Seamless Transitions (continued)

"Our oldest was doing too well in Birth-to-Three to automatically qualify for three to five scope of services. He had to transition into a regular preschool environment and fail, which set him back, before screening into the next level up."

- Focus group participant (Prenatal to Five Developmental Screening, Referral, And Connection to Services in King County)





Strong & Stable Families

Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

Parents turn to several sources for key information, with most turning to family members; Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); healthcare providers; and the internet. There was interest in more support for specific parenting skills (e.g., infant care, play based activities, family budgeting) and more culturally grounded and supportive classes.

"They're not saying, 'Okay, we're going to teach you parenting skills,' because that's such a negative, colonized concept. It doesn't look through a Native lens. [Instead, with Ina Maka,] Auntie's at the door and she's coming here to support us and maybe even bringing us a few cans of food."

(United Indians of All Tribes Foundation; Ina Maka Family Program; Community Needs & Readiness Assessment 2017)

System Navigation / Resource Referrals

Barriers included long waiting times, not knowing who to refer to and uncertainty about eligibility requirements. Some parents/caregivers reported a challenge accessing referrals based on racism, immigration status, lack of insurance, and income inequality.

"My daughter has a social worker who has helped me a lot regarding appointments, specialists, and goals to work on with my daughter. This has helped me to have better support. If only we each could have one."

- Focus group participant (Prenatal to Five Developmental Screening, Referral, And Connection to Services in King County)



Strong & Stable Families (continued)

Social Connection / Isolation

There was lots of interest in, use of, and calls for more parent groups to gather support and share experiences. Caregivers experienced isolation because of a variety of reasons, including geography, family rejection due to sexual orientation or gender identity, lack of community-specific spaces, being a stay-at-home mom, employment. Those that sought emotional support through peers had better confidence and less isolation.

"They feel a sense of belonging to a group/church that nourish their needs and family."
– Samoan café host translating group comments (Best Start for Kids Survey Data Brief. How are King County Caregivers Getting Emotional Support, and How are Families Using Resilience to Problem Solve? July 2018)

"I'm OK now. I got used to the loneliness but would still like someone to come to my house. In my culture (Ethiopia) we like people to come to our house."
– Renton participant (What Are Parents and Caregivers Telling Us?: Findings from Maternal Support Services Engagement, Spring 2018)

Family Economic Needs & Housing

Participant caregivers mentioned the need to work to support their families; the struggle to find work; and the challenge of meeting basic need such as diapers, baby wipes, and other baby supplies. These problems are exacerbated for families experiencing homelessness who struggle to provide such basics as a safety, food, and clothing.

"We are in need of resources and don't know who to ask for them."
– Federal Way participant (What are Parents and Caregivers Telling Us?: Findings from Maternal Support Services Engagement. Spring 2018)



Supported Early Learning Workforce



Professional Development/Training/Coaching/Resources Needed

Parents expressed a desire for teachers and providers to have more support and training to support all types of learning, in cultural understanding in instances of discrimination and bullying, and in engaging with families.

"Teachers act like they are afraid of Black kids, it's like you are teaching my daughter. My daughter is a child, she's not teaching you, and you are the teacher!"
– Doshier of Seattle, WA (The Black Family Voice Project)

Retention / Turnover / Recruitment

Some parents expressed that there simply needed to be more childcare workers recruited and expressed interest in recruiting and retaining more providers and teachers from similar backgrounds, cultures and race.

"Can we get some Black teachers in these classrooms? Black men? There are too many white women teaching our children."
– Parent from King County



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Data gathered September/October 2019