



WASHINGTON
COMMUNITIES
for CHILDREN



Early Learning Community Outreach SUMMARY REPORT

Project Child Success

Summer 2020

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.



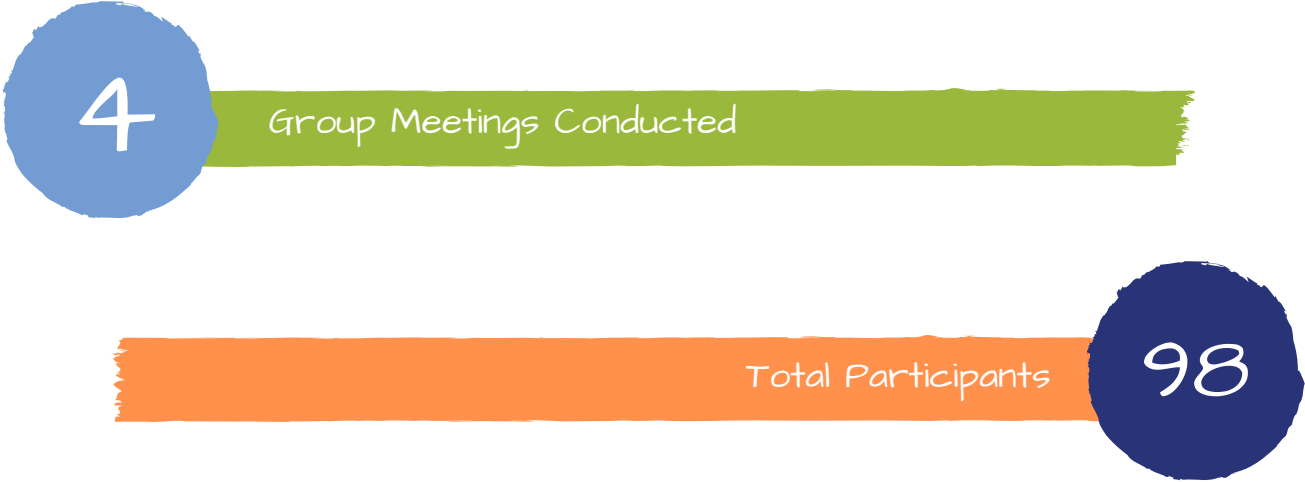
Background & Methodology (continued)

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 **Pierce County by Project Child Success**.



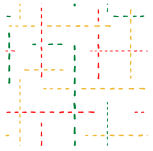
Data Sources



- **Self-reported race and ethnicity** (NOTE: Only 12 of 98 participants reported)



- **Meetings:** Group Meetings were Project Child Success Partnership Meetings held at the Boys & Girls Club - Schatz Branch in Tacoma, A Step Ahead, The Escape Zone at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, and the Pierce County Library Administrative Center.
- **Respondent composition:** A mixture of early learning professionals, parents and caregivers.



Cross-Cutting Issues

Affordability (48 comments)

Affordability came up primarily from parents searching for more options for subsidized or free child care, especially for those who could not afford private child care or qualify for subsidies. Many of these parents reported structuring their work and families around meeting their child care needs, including have to “change my schedule and work nights” or “work 2 jobs”. Others expressed that with more money, they’d choose particular options for their child, including “outdoor,” “Montessori,” “Waldorf,” “whole-day,” and “bi-lingual.”

“I know women who have quit because they couldn’t get into daycare because of the cost.”

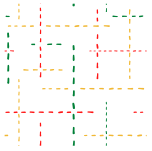
“And if you make a certain income, if you’re just a dollar over – you can’t get any help. How do you expect people to work and survive?”

Availability of Services (23 comments)

Most parents discussing availability discussed difficulty finding child care to meet their needs, in general, but also to meet needs like part-time,” or “night child care”; while some wanted other services, especially parent groups. Providers comments were mostly on needing more services in more places: “where you live dictates the quality of intervention services you receive.”

“The cost, the fear, and there is being able to get into a child care center can be really hard and really, really tough.”

“Especially when it comes to ABA or other therapies – some of the families that live in Ortin for example will never get certain therapies unless they drive to Tacoma.



Cross-Cutting Issues (continued)

Accessing Services (21 comments)

Access came up in a number of ways – parents who simply couldn't access child care or other services because of cost, "location really matters" or needing "resources that are open after hours and on weekends." Both families and providers mentioned that accessing some services – needing the right diagnosis, etc. - can be hard.

"Lots of families who would like to access child care but feel like it's impossible because of the cost and the wait list."

"I read the dominant language, I have access, I have resources and support. I can do what needs to get done. My biggest complaint is the hassle. And then I think, what's it like for someone who doesn't have the means, support, resources, time and the... you know?"

Equity/Inequity/Diversity/Inclusion/Disparities/Disproportionality (22 comments)

Parents and providers discussed needing more equitable provisions and availability of services. For example, some mentioned the need for "more inclusive" and "less discrimination." Others commented on the need for more services to accept "child care subsidies" and include children with "developmental delays." As one said, "This is a social justice issue. We are truly inadequate." There were several mentions of different or inequitable standards by geography or school district.



Powerful Communities and Responsive Early Learning System



Better Coordination of Services and Supports (23 comments)

Providers mentioned relying on “relationships” from local coalitions and councils to help coordinate and serve families, but that the system was often “splintered” including “too many counties,” and “too many school districts,” with variation across each one.

“There is a significant need for early intervention and center based child care providers to collaborate and train one another and work together. This is not always a mutual supportive situation and there is a significant need here.”

“There is not one organization/agency monitoring all early intervention systems across the state...like in Nevada, who monitors all early intervention. So when people from Kent move to Snohomish, they have a completely different early intervention experience. It shouldn’t be that way in the whole state.”

Business and Employers (11 comments)

There was lots of interest in ways employers could support families and child care. Responses ranged from “childcare that is on the work campus,” to “babies at work policies,” to simply “more understanding companies” or “understanding boss” for parents with young children.

“It would be great to have businesses with childcare in them. Large corporations should recognize and support families more.”

Need for System Financing/Sustainability/Additional Funding Sources (10 comments)

Providers need more funding for workers and for services to meet the needs in their community. Some mentioned using grants or fundraisers “to help fund so our families don’t have to worry about it.”

“Not enough providers, vast service areas, and not enough funding to go around.”



Healthy Children and Families

Food Security and Nutrition (15 comments)

Several parents mentioned “healthy food” as part of how they support their child’s development, and parents and providers discussed families’ reliance on food banks and WIC, although there were some comments from parents concerned about “the hoops you have to jump through with WIC.”

[‘How do you support your child’s health, development, and growth?']

“Playing, well balanced food, and pizza on Sundays.”

Physical Health (Pediatricians and Medical Providers) (32 comments)

Many parents mentioned doctor’s offices or clinics, including “well visits” and “immunizations,” as part of how they support their child’s development or as organizations that they rely on in the community. Providers also mentioned relying on hospitals, but suggested need for better access to “auxiliary medical services like vision, hearing, and dental for these families without insurance.”

“Whatever well baby visit looks like – pediatrician, seeing the nurse, someone coming to you – anytime there is a health professional – they come to you or you to them, this is an important piece”

Health Care Access and Affordability (17 comments)

Some discussed the need for “access to high quality and affordable health care as “huge,” including for the family and “not just..a child.” Several mentioned specific challenges from insurance plans that don’t cover “developmental delays” (“because the child will grow out of it”) or “home health,” or have a total limit on visits which force the family to make hard choices.

“I think this is why a lot of families avoid services...you start talking insurance. The first question is ‘will my insurance cover it?’ and you see the panic in their eyes.”



Healthy Children and Families (continued)

Knowledge of Child Development (17 comments)

Parents and providers recognized early childhood is “a really amazing time in the child’s development” and “you only get it once.” There was also a call for more investment and training to support the “emotional and mental health for kids.”

“The more I learn about early learning and how children develop, the more passionate I become and realize there is so much more to go as far as advocacy and systematic things that just need to be happen.”



Positive Learning Experiences



Non-Licensed Child Care (56 Comments)

There was a lot of discussion regarding the variety of child care settings (family, licensed child care, etc.). Many brought up the need for more availability, “family friendlier” schedules, locations, and costs, and many parents talked about the high proportion of income going to child care.

“Ideal situation would be for one of us to work full-time and the other person to work part-time. The child care needs to be flexible hours to make it affordable and work. I can’t find part-time work or part-time daycare.”

Informal Activities (51 comments)

Parents discussed a wide variety of ways they support their children and enjoy spending time with their family. Several discussed camping, parks, swimming, and that they “enjoy outside time – it’s a Washington thing.” Others discussed “trying to expand opportunities” and going to library, children’s museum, arts and reading. Both parents and providers talked about the importance of simple play and talking with their child.

“Play centers, libraries – they have become more and more of a hub of arts and crafts and outside the box learning opportunities that weren’t there before – they are hosting the Cook to Learn events in Pierce County too. There is so much innovation going on and they’ve started offering Saturdays and more flexible times.”

Parental Choice / Family Engagement (25 comments)

Parents expressed having choices and the lack of choice for child care. Some choose to keep their kids at home, some stay home because they can’t afford child care, while others have to work for economic reasons.

“My husband stays home with my daughter - that's why we moved to WA so that both of us didn't have to work.”

Positive Learning Experiences (continued)



Preschool / Pre-K (26 comments)

Many parents rely on preschool as part of where their children spend their days – some full-time and some part-time “for socialization” or because it was what was available leading to families having “to navigate strange schedules.” Some providers expressed concern about the “transition from early intervention to preschool” as a “huge problem across special education.”

“A lot of parents we work with when they exit birth to 3 services there isn’t enough Head Start or ECEAP programs or free preschool opportunities to meet the needs for those parents who want them to have some structured, educational opportunities. There are some private preschools but they are too expensive.”

K-12 System (20 comments)

Parents discussed relying on schools as where their older children spend their days and a few mentioned that, given transportation challenges, locating afterschool and services at school “really helps families make their lives easier.” There were several discussions on strengthening connections to early learning, including “focus more on Social/Emotional learning the way that EL classrooms do” and requiring more interaction with early learning teachers. A few mentioned the value of Child Find, working through the district to help get an assessments for ages 3-5.

“Require the School Districts (Kindergarten teachers) to interact with the Early Learning teachers – that would truly benefit the children and smooth their transition.”

Positive Learning Experiences (continued)



Special Education / Children with Special Needs (20 comments)

Both parents and providers mentioned a need for more services, particularly, center-based child care for children with special needs. There was also calls for more awareness, training and education and developing more programs “more inclusive in terms of meeting the needs of kids with special needs.”

“Services that meet families where they are – I have a friend who has a severely autistic son – locating services for him has been horrifically challenging.”

“Some families have not been able to get daycare services because they can’t be “accommodated” and don’t understand some children have different needs. Parents are losing jobs because they can’t get daycare to accommodate their child.”





Strong & Stable Families

Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development (47 comments)

Many references were to parents showing their understanding of how to support their child's development, including instilling routines, "knowing what comes when" and "allowing the space for kids to do it themselves." Providers discussed supporting parents – telling parents to "trust yourself" and acknowledging "parents are so powerful." And both talked about value of additional support for some families in learning to play with and support their child and the need for more resources for new parents.

"I just remember bringing my son home from the hospital and he cried the entire way and I was confused no one told me he wouldn't like the car seat! Expectations and reality definitely collide. It's not like it is on TV or social media."

"There is no one way to be a parent, but there should be a more cohesive network for everyone to have some base of support."

Kinship Care/Extended Families (38 comments)

Several parents mentioned additional family members (particularly parents and siblings) as both part of where their child spends the day and who they rely on in the community.

"We rely on our family."

Overall Family Stability (29 comments)

Many parents talked about the many reasons they love their families and rely on them for support.

"I love that we stick together – help, teach, support, encourage each other."



Strong & Stable Families (continued)

Parental Resilience (25 comments)

Parents resilience was shown in the many ways that parents balanced child care, work schedules, family budget, and often lack of sleep as they “put their kids first and make them priority.” Several discussed that there was “no time for self” and interest in drop-in or respite care, along with more support at home, with help from a nanny, a cook, or a spouse who worked/traveled less.

“My son started daycare when he was 9 weeks old – I was able to change my schedule to work nights and my husband worked days but I didn’t sleep, basically. Now our kids go to full time daycare at the cost of 30% of our income (5 and 1.5 years old).”

Family Economic Needs (19 comments)

Family economic need came up largely either in terms of services they rely on (such as WIC, child care subsidies or food stamps) or families discussing that their choice to work or have both parents work was driven by economic need, while others discussed the “no-mans land for the middle income families” where “They make too much, but not enough.”

[“Where does your child spend the day?”]

“Childcare unfortunately – lucky it’s good childcare. My kids learn a lot, but it’s hard being a working mom when I want to spend time with my kids.”



Strong & Stable Families (continued)

Social Connection/Isolation (37 comments)

Connections to other parents – through church, Moms groups, playgroups, Facebook, and more – came up frequently as a strength for families. At the same time both parents and providers mentioned the need for more ways for parents to “to connect with each other and be more of a village.”

“Mom’s support group forever! Until I aged out and then we renamed ourselves.”

“Lots of the families we work with don’t have a support system or grandparents or social peer supports.”



Supported Early Learning Workforce



Professional Development/Training/Coaching/Resources Needed (29 comments)

Providers have lots of interest in more training on a variety of topics including culture and diversity, mental health, and special needs. In addition, trainings should be easier to obtain (more affordable, more accessible locations, etc.), especially when required by the State.

"Lots of early learning providers want the training, but can't afford it. No time, no ability to do it when it's offered because they are working. SO many barriers for them getting that education that they want and we know is important for them to provide the best environment for their kids."

Compensation/Wages/Benefits/Incentives (18 comments)

Support from parents and providers for higher pay for those working in child care to increase stability of those in the field and attract those who would like to work in early learning but, because of the low pay, "can't afford to work in it."

"Every time my children get attached to a teacher they leave cause they pay them \$12 an hour. It needs to be professionalized and people need to be paid like professionals. The same goes for having more training, education for them. If they were paid like the teachers that they are, that would be a good model."



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