



WASHINGTON
COMMUNITIES
for CHILDREN



Early Learning Community Outreach SUMMARY REPORT

Southwest Washington Early
Learning Coalition (SWEL)

Summer 2020

Prepared for the
Washington State Early Learning Plan Needs Assessment

Data gathered September/October 2019

Table of Contents

Background & Methodology.....	3
Data Sources.....	5
Cross-Cutting Issues.....	6
Powerful Communities & Responsive Early Learning System.....	7
Healthy Children & Families.....	8
Positive Early Learning Experiences.....	9
Strong & Stable Families.....	10
Supported Early Learning Workforce.....	11



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 **Southwest Washington Early Learning Coalition (SWEL)**.



Data Sources



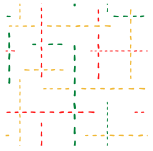
- 4 group meetings
- 6 individual surveys conducted



- **Self-reported race and ethnicity** (NOTE: Only 14 of 27 participants reported)



- **Hosts/Groups included:** Group meetings were held through ESD 112 (in Longview, Vancouver, and undisclosed) and the individual surveys were at a Center Directors meeting.
- **Respondent composition:** A mixture of early learning and care professionals, although some were also parents and answered questions in both capacities.



Cross-Cutting Issues

Affordability (16 comments)

Many of the comments were on working parents' difficulty paying for childcare, with views that "subsidy reimbursement rates" and "income requirements" should both be raised.

"Fully funded early education starting at the age of 3 for everyone, tiered down funding for lower ages. We need high quality care, but we need to afford it first. Families struggle making ends meet when they have to pay full price for care that equals an entire paycheck of one parent."

Availability of Services (6 comments)

Several comments were stating that there should be "free early childhood education, similar to our K-12 program," available to all; other comments were about the lack of availability for specialized services or accommodations.

"There are not enough resources for early intervention to meet the needs of all the children, so staff work to get children up to the bare minimum standards and then "reevaluate" so children don't qualify for services, leaving them to fall behind again, just to make sure room for the next kid."

Powerful Communities and Responsive Early Learning System



Better Coordination of Services and Supports (4 comments)

Several providers discussed frustration, stating “information cannot get through,” and that some centers do not receive adequate attention or communication. Others asked about better referrals and the possibility of a centralized hub of information, so families do not face the challenge that at “every place...retell the story of birth and infant life.”

“I would change how left out some centers feel because they are farther way and are ignored... I would add a better system when it comes to communication instead of giving out a card. I would also add references for parents/staff to go and get extra help.”

Need for System Financing/Sustainability/Additional Funding Sources (11 comments)

Several providers discussed the need for additional funding at multiple levels – “more funding for teaching staff,” “for special education,” and even for “white paper and glue... teachers are paying out of pocket for supplies.” Other comments were mostly about needing funding for training and professional development for staff.

“I would first boost the amount of pay caregivers receive and then add a reasonable budget for obtaining resources. 70% of the time if the teacher doesn’t pay for the supplies out of their measly pay stubs the center/classroom suffers. Right now, about 90% of our allotted center budget goes to providing enough food.”

“System has high expectations for quality standards. We want this for children! We feel it is often underfunded and unsupported to meet those expectations.”



Healthy Children and Families

Knowledge of Child Development (18 comments)

Providers showed clear love of the job and supporting the children and families with a focus on “social emotional development,” “seeing their ah-ha moments!” and “seeing them grow, seeing them thinking.” A few mentioned important resources, including the National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning, the National Center for Effective Mental Health Consultation, and the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University.

“I love seeing a child who is struggling to get their needs met and finding a way to meet those needs and teaching that child appropriate ways to meet them.”

Physical Health (Pediatricians and Medical Providers) (7 comments)

Providers and parents both mentioned medical providers, clinics and pediatricians as people or institutions they rely on. Several parents also mentioned that regular doctor visits were part of how they support their child development.

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

“I expose him to a variety of foods, we spend a lot of time outside, he doesn't use tech devices at all, and he goes to full time childcare where he is interacting with other children. He also has a variety of doctors in his life that provide resources for helping him physically.”

Positive Learning Experiences



Early Achievers/Quality of Care (7 comments)

A few providers mentioned that they relied on their Early Achiever coaches and that Early Achievers “is making it easier for us to transition to the new WACS.” Others mentioned that find the right, high quality child care was difficult and more needed to be done to support high quality in more places.

“Having a childcare center that was closer to home would be nice, without sacrificing the high quality we receive.”

K-12 System (6 comments)

Several providers mentioned that they rely on the local educational school district for support, information and resources.

“ESD 112 has some excellent resources.”

Non-Licensed Child Care (11 comments) & Licensed Child Care (9 comments)

Parents rely on preschool, childcare, ECEAP, parents, friends from church and more to help ensure their children are safe and developing while the parents work. A few discussed that choices were based on a variety of factors, including availability, location, safety, and special services for their children’s needs.

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

“For my son, it has included ECEAP and developmental preschool, OT, PT, SCIP, IEPS. For my daughter it’s been getting her into preschool and daycare to make sure she is provided with quality learning opportunities while I’m at work all day.”



Strong & Stable Families

Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development (8 comments)

Both providers and parents value available resources on parenting and child development, but also expressed the need for more. From wanting general help such as “the proverbial handbook” and “access to parents with older children” to more specific: “it is still very difficult to get help and training when it comes to trauma based care and behavior issues.”

“Knowing more about developmentally appropriate activities, ways to speak, things to teach, etc. Being a parent is a learn as you go experience, but from working within the field of early childhood education, I see there is a lot of science behind teaching children as well.”

System Navigation / Resource Referrals (10 comments)

A few providers mentioned that there should be “more resources and education for parents,” and that “parents struggle to find care and pay for it.” Providers valued being able to be a “resource/support for families.”

“I think that there are many resources for families available, but families don’t always know where to access them.”

Social Isolation / Isolation (6 comments)

Several providers mentioned the “bond you develop with coworkers” and the value of family child care association meetings. Parents mentioned the value of other parents for learning lessons and perspective, and of childcare for providing their children the chance for “interacting with other children.”

“We also rely on our friends from church who have older children and offer support and advice.”

Supported Early Learning Workforce



Professional Development/Training/Coaching/Resources Needed (21 comments)

Providers expressed clear interest in more training and more types of training and several expressed that they understood the new higher standards, but they were also clear that they needed more support, including subsidized or cheaper trainings and being given more time to attend.

"It is hard to receive any training based-off of the WAC rules changing. Also, the 30 hours star training is hard to pay all at once. I am paycheck to paycheck and had to sacrifice \$150 towards this training. I did not get any help."

Licensing/WAC/ECEAP standards (8 comments)

Providers expressed that the "increased education requirements" created "extra stress", and that, to some, the rules felt "always changing," with one comment on too much paperwork and one comment on Early Achievers helping (noted above).

"Strict – the rules are strict and still unclear (WACS). Always changing and hard to follow, mindboggling."

Supported Early Learning Workforce (continued)



Compensation/Wages/Benefits/Incentives (20 comments)

There were many comments on the need for better compensation for a variety of reasons: in response to the higher requirements; to retain quality teachers who “can’t afford to live on current wages”; and as a matter of being “respected and paid as educators” including time for prep and training.

“I think it isn’t as streamlined as it could be. From a staffing standpoint, the pay is far too low and the requirements too high for teachers. It is hard to find high quality teachers when the pay is so low.”

“Dedicated and educated teachers stay in the field because they value early learning. We lose high quality teachers because of the cost of living. We gain inexperienced teachers as a replacement because of the job market and what centers can afford to pay staff.”





WASHINGTON
COMMUNITIES
for CHILDREN

www.WashingtonCFC.org

Prepared for the
Washington State Early Learning Plan Needs Assessment

Data gathered September/October 2019