



WASHINGTON
COMMUNITIES
for CHILDREN



Early Learning Community Outreach SUMMARY REPORT

Southeast

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.



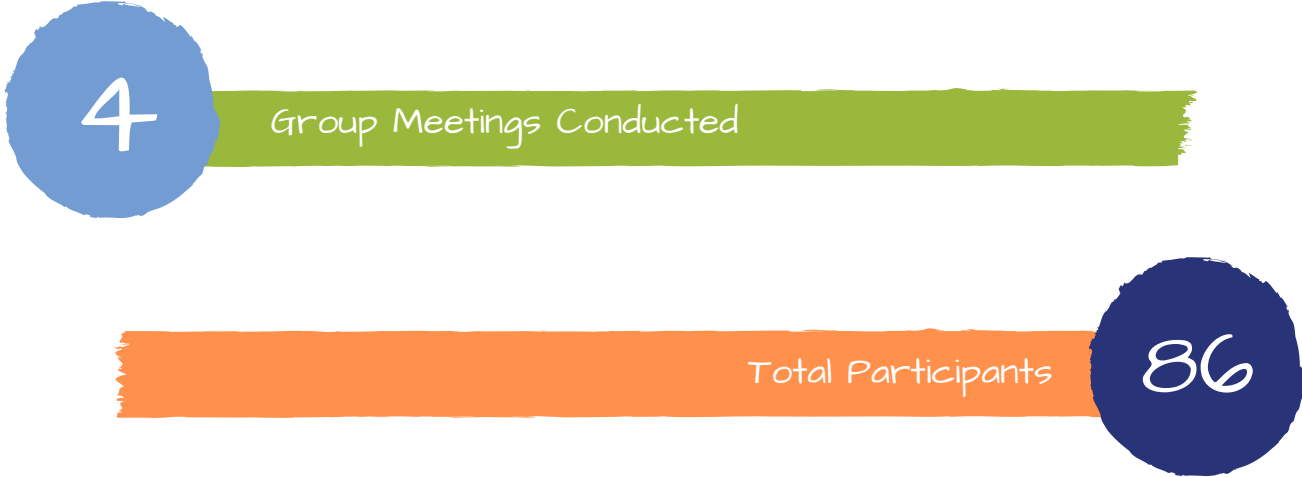
Background & Methodology (continued)

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 the **Southeast Early Learning Coalition**.



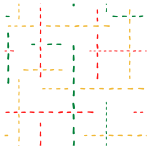
Data Sources



- **Self-reported race and ethnicity** (NOTE: Only 12 of 86 participants reported)



- **Hosts/Groups included:** Benton Franklin Early Learning Alliance, Pasco PFEL, WW Parent Child Center, and Benton Franklin Center Director Network
- **Respondent composition:** Most meetings were early learning professionals and caregivers, with one meeting of parents.



Cross-Cutting Issues

Affordability (13 comments)

Affordability and cost were mostly discussed in two contexts – providers mentioned that childcare was not affordable for many families who earn too much to receive benefits with particular concern that rising minimum wage would worsen the problem; parents discussed affordability in terms of programs they would enroll their children in if cost were no barrier including Waldorf and Montessori style classroom or programs like music, art and gymnastics.

“We try to get more marginalized people into the system but always met with we don’t have the funds to bring them in. Don’t capture enough people. People that don’t qualify but don’t have resource on their own are the ones that we need to serve.

Availability of Services (5 comments) & Access Services (2 comments)

When asked how they would “design the ideal Early Learning system,” Providers discussed many ways to increase access and affordability – including every child having access to child care and preschool, resources for parents, and every provider having access to higher education.

“Every family receives parenting resources, not dependent on how connected you are to resources.”

Powerful Communities and Responsive Early Learning System



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

At the state level, providers called for building bigger coalitions to advocate for more funding to serve more families as a great return on investment, while at the program level, people discussed wanting more funds for such basics as “books and educational materials” and supplies “for parents so they can help with homework.”

["How would you describe the early learning system in WA state?"]

“Underfunded, less than 1 percent of the State budget. Huge pockets of people in poverty that can still not access state funded preschool. Minimum wage is going up. I think it is going to continue to trend badly if we don’t advocate to raise eligibility rates.”

Better Coordination of Services and Supports (9 comments)

There were several comments on programs and services being “fragmented” and “in silos,” or “little communication and collaboration but all doing good work,” and interest in better coordination at the state level and at regional level. Several of the comments were also about need for better coordination among advocates and coalitions to “make a lot more noise than we do separately.”

“Still fragmented, even though it is under a single agency and has been for a while. A lot of services to consider in Early Learning – a lot going that is great for children, but it is hard to see how they feed into each other.”



Healthy Children and Families

Knowledge of Child Development (10 comments)

Providers showed their respect and knowledge of child development when discussing what they love about working in Early Learning, including seeing “them thrive to get ready for school,” “big transitions,” and “those aha moments with children.” They also discussed needing a system that was “whole child focused,” and had “more emphasis on child development for providers.”

["What do you love about working in Early Learning?"]

“Watching the progress of the children. Becoming a part of the family and watching them grow as a family.”

Physical Health (Pediatricians and Medical Providers) (6 comments)

When parents discussed how they supported their child’s health, they discussed “exercise,” “regular doctors visits” and going outside.

Positive Learning Experiences



Informal Activities (11 comments)

When asked who parents rely on, their list includes the site of informal activities such as the parent groups, library and YMCA, in addition parents mentioned they like to support their child's development with play, art and music classes – and if resources were no issue, would do more.

["What would make being a parent easier for you?"]

"Access to more high-quality engaging activities like a good children's museum, science center, more access to nature, affordable housing, better public education system, more walk-able city, more parks with natural elements"

Preschool / Pre-K (11 comments)

Parents discussed preschool as where their children spend their day and/or if resources were no issue, that they would like their children to spend their day at particular high-quality pre-schools. Providers discussed the need for more and more universally available preschool and Pre-K.

"Every child has the right to a preschool."

Licensed Child Care (9 comments) & Non-Licensed Child Care (10 comments)

Parents rely on variety of child-care solutions for where their children spend the day, including pre-schools, day-cares, nannies and babysitters. Providers discussed wanting a future Early Learning system where with child care "access for all" that is "whole child focused" and "family informed" (including alternate hours and meeting special needs).

["If you were designing the ideal early learning system, what would you change?"]

"Whole child focused, making sure all components of health, early learning included."



Strong & Stable Families

Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development (19 comments)

The majority of comments came from providers discussing what would be needed to support parents and families more: classes or “community groups” for parents to feel connected and supported and to “learn the system” and what resources available. Providers who worked with families also clearly took tremendous pride in seeing parents develop in confidence and skills.

["What do you love about working in early learning?"]

“Planting, watering and harvesting. Watching families change and having a totally different attitude towards parenting and who their children are.”

System Navigation/Resource Referrals (11 comments)

Providers were mindful that the early care system can be overwhelming and hard to navigate and wanted more ways for “every family” to know about services (“so aren’t scared of the process”) and what’s available through outreach like – “resource lists that can be printed,” and “advertise ...classes on the radio.”

“As a person just walking in, don’t what it all is. Can only imagine how it is for families. It is anonymous. Hard to discern what your options are as a parent.”

“Parents don’t know where to find resources. The moment that you find out you are going to be a parent you need to learn these things. Going into the health care providers and providing this information? Early learning providers could push it out more.”

Supported Early Learning Workforce



Professional Development/Training/Coaching/Resources Needed (14 comments)

Providers clearly are interested in more training and skills, from the ambitious vision of “systemic change” and “higher education accessible to all providers and “best of the best working with the youngest and most in need” to the practical concerns about training costs being “out of pocket” and need for “scholarships...for new staff.” Others cited a number of helpful resources stating “providers have access to a lot of information” or that they rely on “Early Achievers,” “NAEYC” and “MERIT website.”

["If you were designing the ideal early learning system, what would you change?"]

“Highly trained professionals working with the kids. Best of best working with the youngest and most in need.”

Compensation/Wages/Benefits/Incentives (7 comments)

The comments focused on the need for higher pay to compete with public school pay and higher benefits (e.g. “staff health care”) to get “the best employees,” while at least one recognized that “It is hard to keep rates low for families when you have to provide supports for staffing.”

“Feels like they are pushing us out of the business. Teachers leave for better pay, ratios, benefits, etc. State could provide incentive financially.”



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