WASHINGTON COMMUNITIES for CHILDREN

Early Learning Community Outreach
SUMMARY REPORT

Visions for Early Learning

Summer 2020

Table of Contents

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 **Visions of Early Learning.**
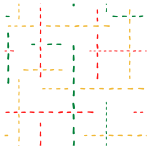
Data Sources

10 Group Meetings Conducted

- 11 individual responses collected

Total Participants **109**

- **Self-reported race and ethnicity** (NOTE: Only 37 of 109 participants reported)

25 White	4 Multiracial	3 Hispanic	3 Native American	1 Asian	1 Pacific Islander

- **Hosts/Groups included:** Meetings were held by Kaleidoscope Play & Learn Groups (4), ESD 113 (3), Thurston County (2), Mason County ELC, the Squaxin Island Child Development Center and Raymond Timberland Library.

- **Respondent composition:** Participants were a mixture of early learning professionals, parents, and caregivers.

Affordability (25 comments)

Several parents mentioned affordability a part of determining where their child spent the day (because they "can't afford preschool"), while others mentioned that if money were not an issue, their child would be some place different – in Christian school, in Montessori type school, doing more activities, at home, or "with others in a learning environment." Several comments mentioned that they rely on free programs such as the play groups, and there was a need for more free or affordable services – including "therapy services," "subsidized daycare," and simply "early learning accessible for all."

> "My daughter is now in 1st grade. I can't say enough how thankful I am that she can go to Boys and Girls Club after school! I could not afford to send her to any other after school childcare and it is difficult for me to always leave work early enough to pick her up."

Availability of Services (8 comments) and Access to Services (4 comments)

Most of the comments were on the need for "more access" for childcare and for more specialized services, with concerns about "lots of gaps", and that it "can be difficult for families to get into programs." Some providers mentioned that some families can't or won't access services because they "may not feel comfortable due to mistreatment or fear" or that they don't have enough "providers that look like/speak language/can connect with families meaningfully."

> "We wish there more access to organizations and early learning programs. In our community every center has a waiting list and not many places, including the school district offer before and after school care."

Powerful Communities and Responsive Early Learning System

Better Coordination of Services and Supports (4 comments)

There was interest a system where "all systems talked and all in one central place" and two stated they relied on the Child Care Action Council.

> "A system where everything aligns: parents' expectations, providers' expectation, etc. It would be ideal if everyone had the same understanding of child expectations and development."

> "Home visiting and support for families so there's no gaps from 0-8. In partnership with all organizations. Opportunities for developmental preschool/head start/early head start. Support for each family individually and for each child. We know it's not just about support for the child in school. If homeless, preschool might not be the highest priority. Meet all the needs of the family.

Need for System Financing/Sustainability/Additional Funding Sources (15 comments)

Comments were largely about the need for more "consistent" "sustainable" funding "that's easy to access and report" to "create quality developmentally appropriate child care programs" make programs more accessible to all.

> "There's a lot of gaps. Many children are not being served. Piece meal with funding for early learning can be difficult for families to get into programs. There is no consistent regular quality. There is no consistency for anything."

> "The system has good intention and passion for quality learning environments and holistic supports for children and families, but fall short in meeting the logistics to make it happen equitably and consistently."

Healthy Children and Families

Knowledge of Child Development (14 comments)

Many providers see the growth and development of the children they work with as a great reward and one of the best parts of their job, and enjoy also sharing this knowledge with parents to build confidence. Some providers also mentioned wanting to see "developmentally appropriate practice expansion until at least 1st grade."

> "We love to 'plant the seeds and watch them grow.' It's one of the best things to see the child, and family start in the infant room and then watch them at preschool graduation as they walk up the stage and give their biggest smile, or when their too afraid to and their teacher runs up and helps them so their parent still gets that picture perfect moment."

Physical Health (Pediatricians and Medical Providers) (24 comments)

When discussion how they support their child's health, development and growth, several parents included doctors, clinics, "well child visits," and "vaccines" as an important element. In addition, several providers mentioned local doctors, clinics and health department as organizations they rely on.

> "Regular doctor appointments, physical activity, sleep, keeping a schedule, good food – nutrition. I research her age bracket, and what is expected."

Developmental Screening / Developmental Delays (13 comments)

Almost all of these comments were parents responding that they rely on "In-Tot Developmental Center," frequently along with other day care, other parents or other caregivers.

> ["Are there particular people or organizations you rely on?"]
>
> Yes, In-Tot (for therapy services) and my work to be flexible to have time off for appointments and therapies as well as financial support."

Food Security and Nutrition (20 comments)

Several parents mentioned nutrition, "good food," or "balanced diet" as part of how they support their child's growth and development. In addition, several mentioned relying on WIC, food stamps or food banks.

> "GRuB [Garden Raised Bounty] from Thurston County has given us tremendous opportunities to learn about our surroundings, as well as the Squaxin Island Community Garden and the Squaxin Island Tribe"

Informal Activities (40 comments)

In parents' answers to where their child spend the day and how they support their child's growth and development, a number of informal activities were mentioned, with many including libraries, parks and outdoor activities and play groups.

> "They spend their day between home, playgroups, or family - to give her life experience to open her world, have interaction, socialization, and teaching that is necessary before she goes to school."

K-12 System (13 comments)

Several providers mentioned that they rely on the local school district as a valuable resource, while others mentioned that parents need more help navigating the schools to get what they need (e.g., IEPs) and that work needs to be done on improving the transition into K-12 system. Some providers expressed concerns whether the "academic stresses" put on kindergarten/1st grade are "developmentally appropriate" with a feeling that "things have gone awry."

> *"We need more people in the K-12 to understand and bridge the work we do. A focus from the K-12 people to understand how important early learning, and not devalue what we do"*

Non-Licensed Child Care (40 comments) & Licensed Child Care (38 comments)

The importance of childcare came up from parents who rely on some combination of spouses, parents, childcare centers, service centers, before- and after-school care, and more, while still expressing the need for more access to care, including occasional baby-sitter.

> *["Where does your child spend the day?"]*
>
> "Depends on the day – parents, grandparents, or school, to learn and be cared for."

Parental Choice / Family Engagement (33 comments)

Parents make a variety of choices for where their children spend their day – some choose home for safety, for cost, for transportation reasons, while others choose day care for interaction or so they can work. If money were no barrier, several would choose differently – including both keeping their child home or placing them in a different program.

> *["Where does your child spend their day and why?"]*
>
> *"Home – a choice so they are safe and well cared for."*

Developmental Preschool / Children with Disabilities (11 comments)

Several parents mentioned that they rely on developmental preschool for supports for their children along with specialists (e.g., physical therapists) while other parents and providers mentioned the need for more such specialized developmental services.

> *"We have increasing need for better child and family supports for children who are differently abled. Our mental health system is inadequate for Medicaid eligible children who are birth to 5 years of age – wait lists are too long and certain modalities proven effective for the young child are not available."*

Strong & Stable Families

Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development (36 comments)

Parents quotes revealed the ways they try and support their child's development, including "research her age bracket," "give child her independence" and "encouraging growth," while a few mentioned it would help to "have a book" or "know more information about child development, parent ed." Several providers mentioned how much they value "helping parents" support their child's growth and development and "empowering parents to become proud of the parents they are."

> "Potential for growth and change for both children and families. Way to access and bring services to families. I love witness that change in families – it can be small but now they know about development."

System Navigation / Resource Referrals (30 comments)

Parents and providers mentioned a wide range of resources they rely on to find information and services, including turning to coalitions (particularly the "Child Care Action Council"), websites, schools, local health departments and libraries. Comments were generally about the ability to find resources, but a few mentioned it can be difficult and wish for "resources in a centralized location" and the need to "teach our families to advocate for their children." Several providers mentioned an ideal system would include a "warm handoff" where one can "call the provider so they know the family is coming and is expecting them vs. cold calling."

> "I would like more options for info sharing. It seems that the state (along with many entities) has become very webinar-dependent for info sharing and professional development. Sometimes it would be helpful to have more face-to-face options."

Kinship Care / Extended Families (32 comments)

When parents are asked who they rely on, or where their children spend the day – a number of extended family members are frequently mentioned, including "daughter," "family," "her dad," "grandparents" and "lots of cousins with children of all ages."

> "I rely on other moms in my family, they provide wisdom and guidance – it's not their first rodeo."

Overall Family Stability / Families in Crisis (30 comments)

Parents clearly draw a lot of strength from their family – "we work so well together as a unit," "we are extremely close," or "depend on each other, count on each other, and have fun with each other." Several providers value work "empowering children, families and staff to achieve their goals."

> *["What do you love about your family?"]*
>
> "How we work so well together as a unit, very dedicated to our family and our children to give them every opportunity to be successful people in our world."

Supported Early Learning Workforce

Professional Development/Training/Coaching/Resources Needed (33 comments)

Many seemed to support the efforts to "professionalize the field," and several mentioned a variety of coaching resources, but there was interest in more support for the training in terms of paid time, lower-cost classes and easier access.

> "Training funds would be very helpful; ECEAP and merit have specific requirements around the number of training hours each staff is expected to receive annually yet there are no set aside training funds disbursed to ECEAP programs by the state."

Licensing/WAC/ECEAP standards (19 comments)

While several recognized "the state had a good grasp on early learning," they also found the work "more challenging" with "increased requirements" and felt that the standards should "not just [be] one size fits all centers," and "more authentic" with "experience in the field." A few mentioned they wanted "support with understanding and implementing the new WACS."

> "We feel that the state is attempting to hold us all to the same standards when we know there are centers who scored a level 4 in Early Achievers, just like we did, but we would not send our child to the other center. We do not think the state recognizes cultural differences when it comes to its standards and requirements."

Compensation/Wages/Benefits/Incentives (12 comments)

Many of the comments were on the need for more pay and other compensation (training time, benefits, etc.) for providers in order to retain quality professionals, especially given the increased levels of requirements and expectations.

"We need our profession to be on the same level as K-12. Financially, professionally, the whole thing. We need compassionate people who want to work with children. People need to be able to see early childhood as a viable career option."

"Ridged requirements with no pay to back it up. If we cannot make a living wage how on earth, are we going to practice self-care? This is a luxury we would all like to do in order to combat burn out."

WASHINGTON
COMMUNITIES
for CHILDREN

www.WashingtonCFC.org

Prepared for the
Washington State Early Learning Plan Needs Assessment

Data gathered September/October 2019