



POLICY PLATFORM

Children rely on us to grow and thrive, but child care isn't working for families. Washington state is in a bind – parents can't afford to pay more for care, while providers can't raise wages and grow their businesses. We have a clear path forward to support parents and providers so that child care can work for everyone. This policy platform is our long-term vision for child care in Washington, building on the foundation of existing efforts, including the [Fair Start for Kids Act](#) and [ECEAP](#) entitlement.

Ensure families have access to affordable, high-quality child care that meets their needs

1. Create a child care guarantee for all Washington families

- a. Maximize access to affordable child care within the current federal [Child Care Development Fund](#) rules.
- b. Remove the income cap and make all families, regardless of income, eligible for [Working Connections Child Care \(WCCC\)](#).
- c. Eliminate copayments for eligible families who have incomes below 150% FPL, are experiencing homelessness, have child with a disability, are enrolled in Head Start/Early Head Start, are involved with child protective services, or other categorical exemptions to be determined.
- d. Reduce copayments for all families by capping copayments at \$15 per month for families with annual household income of less than \$400,000.

2. Reduce barriers and ensure equitable access for families

- a. Establish categorical eligibility for WCCC for families participating in existing programs such as [Head Start](#), [TANF](#), [SNAP](#), and [Working Families Tax Credit](#).
- b. Allocate resources for education and outreach to families.
- c. Create a streamlined online application and eligibility determination process with both online and phone support available in multiple languages.

3. Increase access to before/after school, summer, and evening/weekend care

- a. Increase WCCC rates for Family, Friend, and Neighbor care.
- b. Expand targeted funding for after-school care.
- c. Increase and expand eligibility for the WCCC rate enhancement for non-standard hours care.

4. Support inclusion of children with special needs

- a. Allow presumptive eligibility for the WCCC special needs rate so that services are not delayed while awaiting diagnosis.
- b. Create pathways for child care providers to directly initiate and access services to meet the needs of children in their care who do not (and may never have) a formal special needs diagnosis.
- c. Fully fund supports and coordination between programs for special needs care, minimizing disruptions to children.
- d. Support families of children with special needs to access care arrangements that best meet their unique situations, including permitting Medicaid reimbursement for family caregivers.

Support a thriving early care and education workforce

1. Ensure child care providers receive living wages and benefits honoring the essential work they do

- a. Codify use of the Cost of Quality Care Rate Model in accordance with the recommendations of the Early Educator Design Team to set WCCC rates that reflect the true cost of care and fully fund it with each Cost of Care Survey update.
- b. Institute a wage scale which includes a wage floor for all child care workers and wage bands that allow flexibility for child care employers. The wage floor should reflect current standards for licensing and Early Achievers.
- c. Ensure that new, industry-specific compensation requirements may only be enforced once child care guarantee implementation has reached sufficient scale to ensure adequate public resources in the system for child care employers to be able to meet wage requirements. Any wage requirement should include exemptions for owner/operators. Enforcement of any new compensation requirements should utilize existing regulatory systems.
- d. Implement interim mechanisms to address the compensation crisis as Washington works toward full scale implementation of the child care guarantee.

2. Support child care providers to meet requirements and deliver the high-quality care families need

- a. Fully fund DCYF staffing and infrastructure to deliver provider support services. Make services available in child care provider home languages with case management support for navigating systems.
- b. Fully fund grants, enhancements, or incentives for providers and ensure equitable distribution of resources in a mixed delivery system based on provider feedback.
- c. Fully fund community-based professional development and resources, in child care provider home languages, to support and grow the child care workforce to ensure that Washington can respond to increasing family demand for access to care.

- d. Ensure access to specialized professional development to support providers to care for children with special needs.
- e. Streamline child care provider access to information and resources through creation of a co-designed centralized online information hub, in provider home languages, that serves as a single point of entry to connect providers to the array of resources available to them from a wide variety of sources.
- f. Incentivize and require systems of higher education institutions to increase access, navigation supports, and innovative practices to meet the needs of the diverse and growing child care workforce. Ensure seamless connections from the community-based professional growth pathway to credit-bearing certificate and degree programs.

3. Increase relational health and infant and early childhood mental health supports for children and providers in diverse settings

- a. Expand mental health consultation and explore additional strategies to meet community needs.

Leverage data and align systems to maximize equity and effectiveness

1. Ensure access to high quality data to guide decisions and increase accountability

- a. Create, and fully fund necessary infrastructure for a comprehensive data dashboard that is regularly updated, regionalized, and available in home languages which pulls together multiple data sources from across agencies.

2. Enable integrated and inclusive classrooms

- a. Without changing minimum licensing standards, identify and address inconsistencies and reduce contradictions across various standards and programs that are often provided in the same setting.

3. Pair new resources with accountability to support high quality, anti-racist, anti-judgmental implementation of programs and resources

- a. Implement measures to ensure a culture of respect at the agency for families and providers navigating state systems.
- b. Establish regular reporting by DCYF to evaluate uptake, language access, and program outreach performance.

Ensure adequate facilities for expansion of the early care and education system

1. Maximize investments in the Early Learning Facilities (ELF) fund

- a. Expand grants, loans, and technical assistance for eligible early learning programs to meet health and safety requirements, preserve existing capacity, and expand access.

2. Explore new approaches to meet the long-term facilities needs to scale access for children and families

- a. Adequately resource and implement a comprehensive strategy for expanding early learning facilities maintenance and development with robust support services, based on lessons learned from other sectors as well as existing programs and pilots.

IN SUPPORT:

