Partner Roundtable 2027 Legislative Agenda

Washington's children, families, and employers utterly depend on child care. Remarkably, 87% of Washington families use child care. Families across Washington consistently rate affordability as their top concern. They are paying more and more out of their shrinking budgets for necessities, child care bills are up for everyone, and for many Working Connections Child Care families their co-pays have as much as doubled. Meanwhile, providers are having to do more with less while employers continue to see unreliable care fuel a workforce shortage they can't get ahead of. Already, lack of access to care for young children costs our state $6.3 billion a year, with the most acute impact on working families. We can and we must do better. Nearly two-thirds of Washington voters rank child care as their top priority. In the 2027 legislative session, we urge lawmakers to protect essential investments in child care.

Families Can't Afford Higher Child Care Costs: Protect Working Connections Child Care Eligibility and Family Access to Care

No child care, no paycheck. Quality child care, including care supported by Working Connections Child Care, allows parents to go to work and build the state's economy. It also keeps workers employed, families housed, and food on the table. Families' access to care also depends on rate enhancements for the care hardest to find: infant care, non-standard hours care, and care for children with special needs.

Reducing access to Working Connections will not reduce families' need for child care. It will shift the burden to working parents, employers, and the state's public safety net programs, and will leave many families out of care and out of the economy.

Providers Are in the Red: Protect Child Care Reimbursement Rates at the 75th MRS 2026 and Hold Providers Harmless

Continue funding Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) reimbursement rates at the 75th percentile of the 2026 Market Rate Survey (MRS) and hold providers harmless. Child care programs operate with very narrow margins, and even small changes to revenue threaten their ability to stay afloat. Providers in Eastern and Southwest Washington, along with King, Skagit, and Whatcom counties, would see cuts if funded at the 75th percentile of the 2026 Market Rate Survey.

These rate reductions will have a significant impact on school aged care providers, who also stand to lose significant program support with the state's new childcare attendance-based pay policy. After school spaces see more inconsistent attendance rates since children may miss time due to school or home reasons. Lawmakers can help programs stay in business by funding reimbursement rates at the 75th percentile of the 2026 MRS, preventing reductions in rates for any providers, and by funding the collective bargaining agreement for providers represented by SEIU 925. Cuts to these investments threaten family access and affordability.

Protect Quality and Safety in Washington's Child Care System

Ensure Equitable Access to High Quality and Care Through Early Achievers

For providers serving families through Working Connections Child Care (WCCC), reimbursement rates don't reflect the true cost of providing high-quality care. Early Achiever's quality supports and financial incentives help offset these challenges, enabling providers to maintain and improve quality while continuing to serve WCCC families. Providers want to deliver evidence based, high-quality child care, but the economic model of the child care sector would make this impossible for many without the state investment in provider capacity that the Early Achievers system offers.

Decades of research show that high-quality child care programs promote children's school readiness, in addition to providing other cascading benefits such as higher educational attainment and lifelong income. Children only get these benefits, and the state only receives the high return on investment that is proven from these programs, if the care provided is high quality. Cuts to the Early Achievers system will harm those children and families who are furthest from opportunities and rely on the subsidy system for care.

Preserve Funding for Provider and Program Level Supports

Every child has different needs. Washington's provider and program supports ensure providers can meet kids exactly where they are at. This includes dual language child care, support for children with special needs, mental health supports, professional development, and other small, targeted grant programs. Many of these supports were already halved or eliminated in the last biennial budget, and may fail entirely if they are cut further.

In Support:

BrightSpark Early Learning Services
Catholic Charities Central WA
Child Care Action Council
Children's Alliance
Children's Campaign Fund
Community Minded Enterprises
Educational Service District 112
Imagine Institute
KinderCare
OneAmerica
Opportunity Council
ReadyNation
School's Out Washington
SEIU 925
Start Early Washington
WA Head Start ECEAP Association
WA Parent Ambassadors
Washington STEM