

2023 Early Educator Legislative Agenda



Through continued investments in the Fair Start for Kids Act, legislators can make important progress toward stabilizing Washington’s child care industry and improving access for children and families:

1. **Raise Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) rates so families most in need have more care options.**
2. **Implement enrollment-based pay for WCCC to make revenue predictable in alignment with the private market.**
3. **Reduce financial overhead for licensed child care so limited resources can be used for program costs.**

Legislators should also direct the Department of Children, Youth, and Families to make plans for addressing child care workforce recruitment and retention through living wages and benefits.

The child care market was broken before the COVID-19 pandemic and, without legislative action, access and affordability for families will continue to worsen.

- In Washington, 62,370 child care slots were maintained through ARPA stabilization grants that have now come to an end. Without additional investments, child care owners and directors have no choice but to keep wages low and/or charge parents more to balance razor-thin budgets.
- Licensed child care programs face significant challenges recruiting, retaining, and supporting staff in a tight labor market amid rising inflation and competition from retail, hospitality, and service sectors that offer higher wages and benefits. In contrast to private sector employment, which has stabilized, the child care sector is 9.7 percent smaller than it was in February 2020.
- Mothers were disproportionately forced out of the workforce because of COVID-19 and without child care many will be left behind in Washington’s recovery. In September 2020 alone, 78,000 men across the country left the workforce, compared to 600,000 women.

“Children—and perhaps the ability to access quality childcare—are playing a different, and more significant, role than in past recessions and recoveries.” -Federal Reserve of Atlanta, September 2021

Early Educator Design Team

With public solutions that recruit and retain a thriving workforce, the Early Educator Design Team’s vision is that all families – beginning with those most in need – have access to affordable, quality early care and education opportunities. The 34-member design team built a sequenced, multiyear policy platform for child care through a liberatory design process.

In 2023:

- Continued investments in the Fair Start for Kids Act (FSKA)
- In alignment with C3TF recommendations, fund DCYF to plan for delivering wage supplements to early educators

In 2025/26:

- Improve compensation, benefits, and wellbeing for early educators and their families
- Support equitable opportunities for professional growth
- Increase and stabilize revenue for licensed child care programs by expanding access to small business supports

The Provider Design Team’s efforts build on work already underway, including implementation of the Fair Start for Kids Act and the recommendations included in the Child Care Collaborative Task Force’s Cost of Quality Care recommendations. We must address workforce compensation to ensure quality for children and access for families because...

Workforce Role	
Center owners/CEOs	7
Center directors	8
Center teachers	4
FCC owners	9
FCC assistants	3
FFN caregiver	1
Race and Ethnicity	
Black	8
AAPI	4
Latinx	11
White	8
American Indian	5
Primary Language	
English	24
Spanish	10
Geographic Region	
Central	12
Eastern	2
King and Pierce	10
Northwest	4
Olympic Peninsula	5
Southwest	2

Exceptionally low wages lead to high turnover: Child care providers rank in the third percentile of occupational wages (below pet groomers). In fact, 39% of child care providers rely on one or more sources of public assistance to make ends meet. It’s no surprise that even before COVID-19 the child care workforce in Washington had a 43 percent turnover rate.

Secure attachment between a child and their caregiver is at the heart of high-quality early learning: A child with consistent and responsive relationships grows a strong foundation of neural connections that benefits healthy social cognitive, physical, and language development. Conversely, a child without secure relationships can be harmed by fewer and/or damaged neural connections. The child care workforce is a buffer for many young children.

Access to child care is essential for family economic security and mobility: Nationally, 1 in 5 working mothers with a child ages 0 to 3 work in low-wage jobs – 42 percent of working mothers say they would look for higher paying jobs with better access to child care. In fact, 18.3 percent of parents have turned down a job offer or promotion due to child care issues, more often among Black and Native American parents.

The high quality of our child care system is inextricably linked to the diversity of our workforce: The child care workforce closely reflects the racial, ethnic, and linguistic demographics of the children they serve. A recent analysis found that 94% of the U.S. child care workforce are women, 50% of Washington's child care workforce are people of color, and 30% are bilingual or multilingual. Workforce diversity is essential for ensuring parent choice and for providing high quality, culturally and linguistically relevant care.

Addressing provider compensation, and making visible the labor of this essential workforce, is a critical step toward a more just and equitable future: As Fatima Goss Graves noted in her opinion piece, [the roots of our child care crisis are in the legacy of slavery](#): “The invisibility of child care workers today can be connected directly to the invisibility of Black women who provided care both as coerced labor and underpaid workers before and after the Civil War in conditions that made it difficult to also care for their own children.” The legacy of racist wage gaps continues to this day. Even after controlling for educational attainment, African American early educators still earn an average of \$0.78 less per hour than white early educators, which means \$1,622.40 less per year for a full-time, full-year worker.

