

APPENDIX A

Early Care and Learning Ecosystem

Making affordable, high-quality early learning and care accessible to all children in the Walla Walla Valley

Contents

- Introduction 3
- Total children..... 3
- Existing child care.....5
 - Public programs.....5
 - Early Childhood Education Assistance Program (ECEAP)5
 - Head Start11
 - Transitional Kindergarten13
 - Developmental Preschool.....14
 - Preschool Promise15
 - Private in-home and center-based providers15
 - Family, Friend, and Neighbor providers16
- Child care subsidy need..... 17
 - Priorities..... 17
 - Infants19
 - Children from single-parent households.....19
 - Children with disabilities.....21
- Endnotes 26

Introduction

This is Appendix A to the “Making affordable, high-quality early learning and care accessible to all children in the Walla Walla Valley” executive summary.

This appendix provides an overview of the current demand for and supply of early care and learning programs in the project area. It summarizes existing programs and their capacity, describes child care need, and identifies three high-priority populations a locally funded early care and learning subsidy program could focus on as a pilot or the first step of an incrementally phased-in universal program.

All data for this section was collected and compiled at the zip code scale. For ease of interpretation, we refer to the associated places for each zip code listed in Table 1 throughout the report rather than the zip code.

Total children

In 2020, 4,051 children under 5 years old lived in the project area (Table 2, Figure 1). The methodology we used to calculate the single-year age breakdown reported in Table 2 is described in the methodology appendix.

Figure 2 shows the number of births in Walla Walla County by year from 2003 to 2020.¹ Overall, the number of children in Walla Walla County and the broader study area has been decreasing. For example, Walla Walla County had 15% fewer births in 2020 than in 2010. The birth data explain the fewer numbers of younger children in Figure 1.

TABLE 1 | Zip codes and associated places

Zip Code	Associated Place
97862	Milton Freewater
99323	Burbank
99324	College Place
99328	Dayton
99329	Dixie
99348	Prescott
99359	Starbuck
99360	Touchet
99361	Waitsburg
99362	Walla Walla
99363	Wallula

FIGURE 1 | Total children by age in the project area, 2020

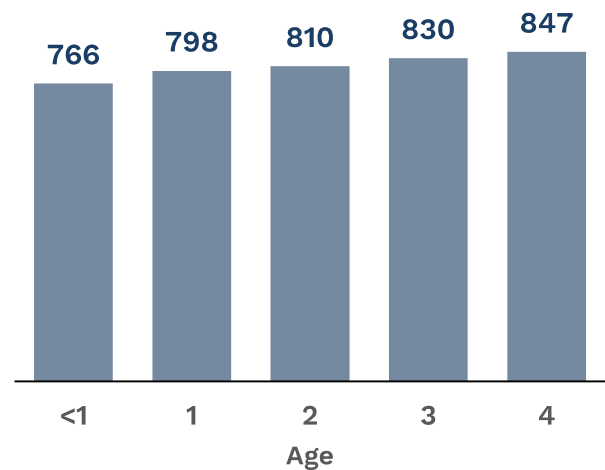
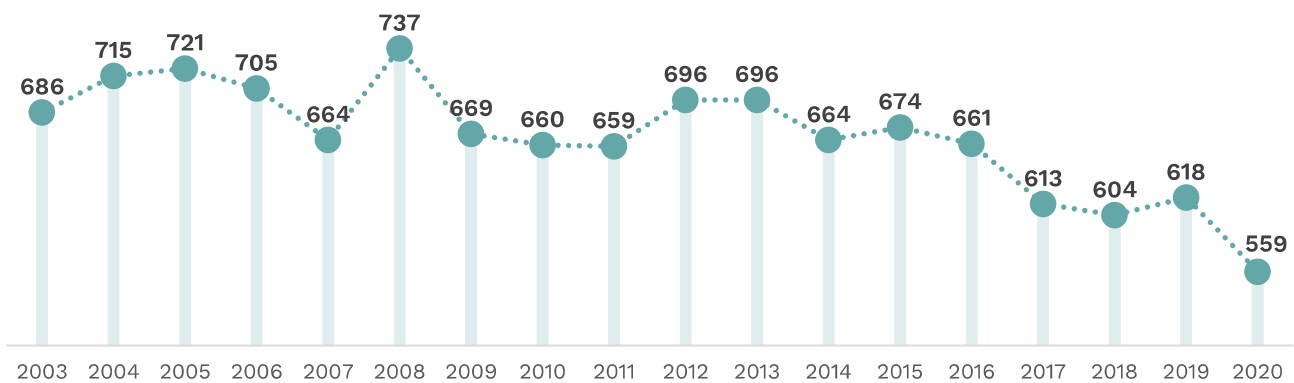


TABLE 2 | Number of children by age, county, and town, 2020

	Town	Total children under 5 years old	Age				
			< 1	1	2	3	4
WA	Columbia County	170	32	33	34	35	36
	Dayton	170	32	33	34	35	36
	Starbuck	13 ^a	2	3	3	3	3
	Walla County	3,281	620	646	656	673	686
	Burbank	236	45	46	47	48	49
	College Place	417	79	82	83	85	87
	Dixie	3	1	1	1	1	1
	Prescott	170	32	33	34	35	36
	Touchet	94	18	19	19	19	20
	Waitsburg	55	10	11	11	11	11
	Walla Walla	2,280	431	449	456	467	477
	Wallula	26	5	5	5	5	5
OR	Umatilla County	5,126	969	1,010	1,025	1,051	1,071
	Milton-Freewater	600	113	118	120	123	125
Project area		4,064	768	800	813	832	850

^a 2020 US Census data show zero children under 5 years old living in the Starbuck zip code (99359) with a margin of error of 13. There are children under 5 in Starbuck; therefore, we used the maximum margin of error. We used the number reported by the US Census for all other zip codes.

FIGURE 2 | Total births in Walla Walla County by year



Existing child care

The project area has a variety of programs available for families with children under 5, including public and private options. Each program has specific age and sometimes other eligibility requirements.

Public child care and early learning includes programs funded by the federal or state government. The following is a list of public programs available in the project area:

- Early Childhood Education Assistance Program (ECEAP)
- Head Start, including Early Head Start and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start
- Transitional Kindergarten
- Developmental Preschool
- Preschool Promise

The private child care and early learning programs include licensed in-home and center-based care, along with Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) providers.

All programs are explained in detail in proceeding sections.

Table 3 shows the total existing child care slots by location. Total existing child care slots were estimated directly from program reports and interviews with program directors. We compiled child care slots in the

region by age, location, subsidy acceptance, and more. If slots are not included in the final tally, it is because information was not publicly available and program contacts did not respond. Furthermore, if it was difficult for us to find out if there were slots, those seeking child care likely would have similar difficulty, making the slots inaccessible.

Public programs

Total capacity at public programs by location is shown in Table 4.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (ECEAP)

ECEAP is an early learning program funded by Washington State for children ages 3 and 4. Program eligibility is based on family income in relation to the Washington State Median Income (SMI). In 2022, family income must be at or below 36% of SMI for a child to qualify for the program. Children who have been identified by their school district for special education, children with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), children experiencing homelessness, and tribal children at or below 100% SMI are also eligible for ECEAP. Final eligibility for all programs is determined by program staff.

TABLE 3 | Total child care slots by age and location

	Place	Age					Total
		<1	1	2	3	4	
WA	Columbia County	0	0	0	9	9	18
	Dayton	0	0	0	9	9	18
	Starbuck	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Walla Walla County	68	134	135	493	598	1,428
	Burbank	0	9	9	16	16	50
	College Place	4	6	7	43	66	126
	Dixie	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Prescott	8	17	17	30	30	102
	Touchet	0	0	0	5	15	20
	Waitsburg	0	0	0	10	10	20
	Walla Walla	56	102	102	389	461	1,176
	Wallula	0	0	0	0	0	0
OR	Umatilla County						
	Milton Freewater	25	64	64	209	210	572
	Total slots	93	198	199	711	817	2,084

TABLE 4 | Total public slots by age

	Place	Age					Total
		<1	1	2	3	4	
WA	Columbia County	0	0	0	9	9	18
	Dayton	0	0	0	9	9	18
	Starbuck	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Walla Walla County	20	31	32	240	338	661
	Burbank	0	0	0	10	10	20
	College Place	0	0	0	15	30	45
	Dixie	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Prescott	0	0	0	10	10	20
	Touchet	0	0	0	5	15	20
	Waitsburg	0	0	0	10	10	20
	Walla Walla	20	31	32	190	263	536
	Wallula	0	0	0	0	0	0
OR	Umatilla County						
	Milton Freewater	16	47	47	99	99	308
	Total public slots	36	78	79	348	446	987

Current and planned program capacity

Table 5 shows the current, planned, and ideal number of ECEAP slots throughout the project area. Current slots represent the number of children each program can serve for the 2022-2023 school year. Together these programs have 217 slots. Planned slots have been identified through interviews with program managers and school superintendents. Programs in the project area are currently planning to add 55 slots through program and facility expansion projects, though timelines vary for when these slots will be available. Assuming these projects are successful (e.g., grants needed to complete projects are awarded), the region will have 232 ECEAP slots.

Program-specific notes:

- **Dayton School District** has 18 half-day ECEAP slots and no plans to expand.
- **Columbia School District** has 20 full-day ECEAP slots and no plans to expand.
- **College Place School District** has 15 full-day ECEAP slots and is planning to move the program from a church (Iglesia Adventista del Septimo Dia de College Place) to the school district property where the District could support 40 full-day slots. The 40 total slots should be available during the 2023-2024 school year.

Washington Fair Start for Kids Act

A major change is Washington passed the Fair Start for Kids Act in May 2021, which will significantly increase resources in Washington State.

The Fair Start for Kids Act takes a multi-pronged approach at solving the child care crisis in Washington state. The legislation will:

- Reduce copays and expand eligibility for the Working Connections Child Care and the Early Childhood Education and Assistance programs.
- Make capital investments to expand existing child care facilities and build new facilities.
- Strengthen child care programs by expanding access to support services, mental health consultations, dual language supports and more.
- Grow recruitment and retention for child care businesses by increasing subsidy rates, expanding access to health insurance for providers and providing resources for professional development.

These are big moves, which DCYF is in the process of rolling out over the next couple years. This will reduce the gap in resources from what it was a year ago and from what it is right now. It is a big step towards addressing the middle-income dilemma (see Feasibility Study pp. 39-46) in terms of dramatically increasing eligibility to include the entire middle-income group, etc.

- **Prescott School District** has 20 expanded-day slots (10 hours). The school district is in the planning and feasibility process to build a new facility that would house the ECEAP program with a capacity to serve 30-40 children.
- **Touchet School District** has 10 full-day ECEAP slots and no plans to expand.
- **INSPIRE** has 40 ECEAP slots.
- **Walla Walla Public Schools** has 94 full-day ECEAP slots and no plans to expand.
- **Waitsburg School District** does not have any ECEAP slots; however, it is planning to renovate an existing building on school district property to serve 20 children. This project is in the planning and feasibility stage.

TABLE 5 | *Current and planned slots for ECEAP programs in the project region*

Program	Location	Current	Planned
Dayton School District	Dayton	18	0
Columbia School District	Burbank	20	0
College Place School District	College Place	15	25
Prescott School District	Prescott	20	10
Touchet School District	Touchet	10	0
INSPIRE Development Center	Walla Walla	40	0
Walla Walla Public Schools - Walla Walla Center for Children & Families	Walla Walla	94	0
Waitsburg School District	Waitsburg	0	20
Total		217	55

Early ECEAP

Washington State also funds an Early ECEAP program, which serves children birth to three. For more program information, visit:

<https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/early-learning-providers/eceap/early-eceap>.

Currently there are zero Early ECEAP programs in the project region, although the following interest has been expressed:

- Prescott School District is interested in supporting between 8 and 16 extended-day (10-hour day) Early ECEAP slots to be housed in Vista Hermosa.
- With the building renovation planned at Waitsburg School District, they hope to support at least 8 Early ECEAP slots.
- In Walla Walla, private center-based providers are interested in supporting Early ECEAP slots: the YMCA is interested in supporting 8 slots, Angel Bio-Dome wants 8-16, and Bright Beginnings is interested in housing 8-16 slots.
- Dayton School District has expressed interest in supporting 16 Early ECEAP slots.

Together, these programs would serve between 56 and 80 children age birth to three if slots were awarded from the state.

Eligible children

Many more children are eligible for ECEAP than available slots. In 2020, a minimum of 406 children under 5 were eligible for ECEAP services in the project area (Table 6), representing 14.6% of total children under 5.

TABLE 6 | Minimum number of children eligible for ECEAP and Early ECEAP, 2020

Town	Total	Married-couple family household	Single-father household	Single-mother household
Columbia County				
Dayton	4	0	0	4
Starbuck	0	0	0	0
Walla Walla County				
Burbank	15	0	0	15
College Place	73	0	15	58
Dixie	5	0	0	5
Prescott	39	5	10	24
Touchet	9	6	3	0
Waitsburg	13	1	6	6
Walla Walla	222	38	0	184
Wallula	26	26	0	0

Funding expansion and potential impacts

Through the Washington Fair Start for Kids Act, ECEAP program eligibility and slot rates will increase through 2030 (Figure 3). These changes will increase the number of eligible children 75% from 406 total in 2020 to 711 total in 2030 and increase the proportion of children that can be served by ECEAP from 10.6% of children to 17.5% of children (Table 7).

FIGURE 3 | ECEAP expansion timeline

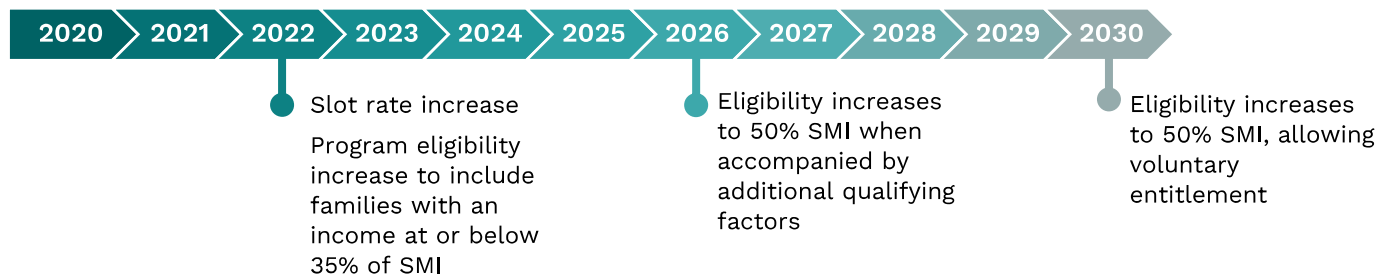


TABLE 7 | Minimum eligible children before and after ECEAP expansion to 50% SMI in 2030

Town	Total 2020	Total 2030	# change	% change
Columbia County				
Dayton	4	10	6	150%
Starbuck	0	0	0	-
Walla County				
Burbank	15	71	56	373%
College Place	73	115	42	58%
Dixie	5	5	0	0%
Prescott	39	51	12	31%
Touchet	9	14	5	56%
Waitsburg	13	17	4	31%
Walla Walla	222	401	179	81%
Wallula	26	26	0	0%
Project area total	406	711	305	75%

HEAD START

Explanation of program, including eligibility criteria

Head Start, Early Head Start, and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start are federally funded early learning programs.

Head Start serves children ages 3 and 4, while Early Head Start serves children birth to 3 years old and pregnant women. Program eligibility is based on family income in relation to the federal poverty level (FPL). In 2022, family income must be at or below 130% FPL, with priority enrollment given to families under 100% FPL. Children experiencing homelessness, children in foster care, and children in families receiving public assistance such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) cash grants and SNAP benefits are also eligible for Head Start programs. In Milton-Freewater, eligibility also includes families who receive SNAP benefits, which in Oregon are families below 200% FPL. Program staff determine final eligibility for all programs.

Migrant and Seasonal Head Start is a type of Head Start program that serves children who qualify for Head Start, live in a household where the income comes primarily from agricultural work, and are younger than compulsory school age by the date used to determine public school eligibility for the community in which the program is located.

Current programs

Table 8 shows the current number of Head Start, Early Head Start, and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start slots available in the project area. Current slots represent the number of children each program can serve for the 2022-2023 school year. Together these programs have 550 slots.

Eligible children

In 2020, a minimum of 521 children under 5 were eligible for Head Start services, 305 of whom were eligible for Early Head Start and 216 of whom were eligible for Head Start (Table 9). The US Census undercounts the number of children in rural areas with small populations; therefore, counter to the numbers reported in Table 9, there are likely eligible children in Dayton, Starbuck, Burbank, and Dixie.²

TABLE 8 | Current enrollment for Head Start programs in the project region

Program	Location	Program Type	Current
Children's Home Society of Washington Early Head Start	Walla Walla	Early Head Start	20
INSPIRE Development Center	Walla Walla	Early Head Start	63
INSPIRE Development Center	Walla Walla	Head Start	71
WWPS - Walla Walla Center for Children & Families	Walla Walla	Head Start	136
Oregon Child Development Coalition	Milton-Freewater	Migrant & Seasonal Head Start	220
Umatilla Morrow Head Start Milton Freewater Center	Milton-Freewater	Head Start	40
Total			550

TABLE 9 | Total Head Start and Early Head Start-eligible children, 2020

	Town	Total eligible children	Early Head Start Eligible (ages 0-2)	Head Start Eligible (ages 3-4)
WA	Columbia County			
	Dayton	0	0	0
	Starbuck	0	0	0
	Walla County			
	Burbank	0	0	0
	College Place	77	45	32
	Dixie	0	0	0
	Prescott	26	15	11
	Touchet	18	11	7
	Waitsburg	5	3	2
OR	Walla Walla	163	96	67
	Wallula	26	15	11
	Umatilla County			
	Milton-Freewater	206	121	85
	Project area	521	305	216

TRANSITIONAL KINDERGARTEN

Explanation of program

Transitional Kindergarten, also called TK, is a full-day, school-based program for children in Washington State who did not have previous access to early learning or child care and have been screened by the school district to need preparation before entering kindergarten. To be eligible, children must be four years old, live within the school district, and be ineligible or otherwise unserved by another program. That is, children who are eligible for ECEAP or Head Start or already served by a private child care program—particularly if the provider is involved with Early Achievers—are not supposed to be placed on the TK priority list. The intention is that TK does not negatively impact or compete with other existing programs.³

Unlike ECEAP and Head Start, TK does not have specific income eligibility criteria and, instead, eligibility and priority criteria are determined at the school district level.

"ECEAP has priority points on multiple criteria. TK is... They have to be four by August 31. They cannot be enrolled in another preschool program. They have just have some sort of developmental delay or need. There's a few pillars on the OSPI website that guide us but we really do not have the eligibility requirements of any other ECAP or Head start. That's why when students do not qualify for ECEAP or Head start, we pull them into TK, if they're four."

– Key Informant

Title 1 funds and all other federal title funds can be allocated to and used for TK students, but extra funds would not be provided to cover TK students. The exception is the Learning Assistance Program (LAP) High Poverty Enhancement, which would give qualifying schools more funding for all the students at the school, including TK students.

Current programs

Three school districts are currently running TK programs in the project area:

- *Starbuck School District* has a combined TK and Kindergarten classroom with total TK enrollment less than 5.
- *Walla Walla Public Schools* serves 72 TK students at the Walla Walla Center for Children and Families and has no expansion planned.
- *College Place School District* is starting a TK program for the 2022-2023 school year. The District will grow the program to support 15 students in one classroom.

DEVELOPMENTAL PRESCHOOL

Explanation of program

Developmental Preschool is legally obligated to serve all children ages 3 and 4 with an IEP, so the number served is based on need.

Current programs

There are two Developmental Preschools in the project area, one run by College Place School District and the other by Walla Walla Public Schools. The program in College Place currently serves 15 children. The program in Walla Walla currently serves 40 children: 36 participate in person, but some also or exclusively receive services from home based on their specific needs.

Eligible children

All children with a disability are eligible for Developmental Preschool programs.

Estimating the number of children under 5 with a disability is difficult for many reasons, including that diagnosis rates of non-physical disabilities are low in this age group and that the sample size of the population in rural parts of the project area is very small. Table 10 estimates the number of children with a disability by age and place using the disability rate of each place for children under 18.

TABLE 10 | Number of children with a disability by age and location, 2020

Place	Disability rate (% children under 18)	Age					Total
		<1	1	2	3	4	
Dayton	7.0%	2	2	2	2	2	9
Starbuck	0.0%	0	0	0	0	0	1
Burbank	0.0%	3	3	3	2	2	13
College Place	4.1%	5	5	5	4	4	23
Dixie	3.6%	0	0	0	0	0	0
Prescott	15.9%	2	2	2	2	2	9
Touchet	10.0%	1	1	1	1	0	5
Waitsburg	15.5%	1	1	1	0	0	2
Walla Walla	7.8%	25	26	26	17	13	107
Wallula	0.0%	0	0	0	0	0	2
Milton Freewater	3.9%	6	4	4	1	2	18
Total	6.2%	45	45	45	30	25	190

PRESCHOOL PROMISE

Explanation of program

Preschool Promise is an Oregon program that provides 900 hours of completely subsidized preschool (six hours a day) for households with income at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). The focus of Preschool Promise is to serve children between 100% and 200% FPL because those living below 100% poverty are eligible for Head Start services in Oregon.

Preschool Promise providers operate in a variety of settings, including in-home child care, child care centers, Head Starts, and school district-based preschools. Preschool Promise requires a minimum salary for teachers and suggests a target pay rate specific to the regional cost of living.⁴

Current programs

Milton-Freewater currently has three Preschool Promise providers: Little Pioneers, Oregon Child Development Coalition, and Umatilla-Morrow Head Start.

Little Pioneers is a program run by Milton-Freewater School District and currently serves 48 preschoolers.

PRIVATE IN-HOME AND CENTER-BASED PROVIDERS

Explanation of programs

Licensed Family Home Child Care in Washington, along with *Certified Family Child Care Homes* in Oregon, are operations where child care providers operate out of a licensed private residence, typically their own. Certified Family Home Child Care providers

can serve all ages, but the maximum allowed capacity and staff-to-child ratios change depending on the age of children present.

Licensed Child Care Centers in Washington, along with *Certified Child Care Centers* in Oregon, are programs that operate in a licensed facility that is not in a private home or school. Centers have classrooms or well-defined spaces that serve specific age groups with age-dependent maximum capacities and staff-to-child ratios. Generally, centers do not have specific income eligibility requirements like state and federal programs.

Partial-day preschools operate privately on a half day or less schedule in Washington. Each partial-day preschool has their own schedule offerings and can include morning classes, afternoon classes, and classes offered on specific days of the week.

Registered Family Child Care Homes are home-based programs in Oregon that may have up to 10 children enrolled, only two of whom can be under 24 months of age. Registered home providers must go through training similar to Certified Family Child Care Homes, but are not held to the same environmental, quality, and personnel requirements.

Current programs

Table 11 shows the total number of known private programs and the minimum enrollment. Some program enrollment was unavailable at the publication date of this report. Nonetheless, the minimum enrollment numbers provide insight into the scale of supply.

TABLE 11 | Number of private care programs and minimum enrollment, 2022

Program Type	Number of programs	Minimum Enrollment*
Licensed and Certified Child Care Centers	14	774
Licensed and Certified Child Care Homes	35	303
Registered Family Child Care	2	20
Total project area	51	1,097

*Enrollment numbers for some providers was unattainable.

FAMILY, FRIEND, AND NEIGHBOR PROVIDERS

Explanation of programs

Family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) care is that provided by family members, friends, babysitters, and neighbors. These providers typically are not licensed and often have close cultural and emotional bonds with the children they care for. Families may also choose FFN care because it is often less expensive and more flexible.

According to key informants, FFN providers can care for up to three children without obtaining a license. FFN providers who care for children related to them are exempt from several state requirements including some trainings, site visits, and drinking water lead testing in Oregon and monitoring visits in Washington.

FFN can be eligible to receive state child care subsidies. In both states, some training and paperwork must be completed to receive state subsidies.

Current programs

Twelve known FFN providers currently operate in Milton-Freewater, with a total capacity of 36 children. The number of providers in Walla Walla and Columbia counties are unknown. Many studies suggest that the number of FFN providers nationwide is much higher than documented.⁵

Child care subsidy need

A central goal of this project was to estimate the amount of funding needed to provide affordable, high-quality early learning and care for all children in the study area under 5 years of age. One aspect of affordability and the funding needed to address it is the extent to which slots are subsidized. We calculated the maximum number of child care slots in need of subsidy by subtracting the total number of existing public slots from the total number of children who live in the study area. Ideally, we would also subtract the number of children who already receive subsidies through the Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) and other state programs; however, after much effort, this data was unattainable.

We included children who have a slot in a private program in the maximum number in need of subsidy because 1) we do not have a way to ascertain the number who are already subsidized, 2) we know many households that do not meet income eligibility for public programs and subsidy cannot afford their child care bill, which cuts into meeting other household needs, 3) there is a greater number of children eligible for public programs than these programs can accommodate, and 4) the Elevate Work Group was interested in quantifying the funding needed to make child care more affordable for everyone whether they already participate in a program or not.

Therefore, estimations are made using the total number of existing public slots instead of the number of slots in both public and private programs. Table 12 shows the total children, total existing public slots, and total maximum number of subsidized slots needed by location.

Other variables that make it impossible to determine the exact number of subsidized slots needed include that participation rates vary by age and not all households want child care, some children need care at non-standard hours, and some children are currently served by a part-day program but need full-day care. Calculations in this report are therefore estimations to give a general idea of the scope of supply versus potential demand for subsidized early learning and care.

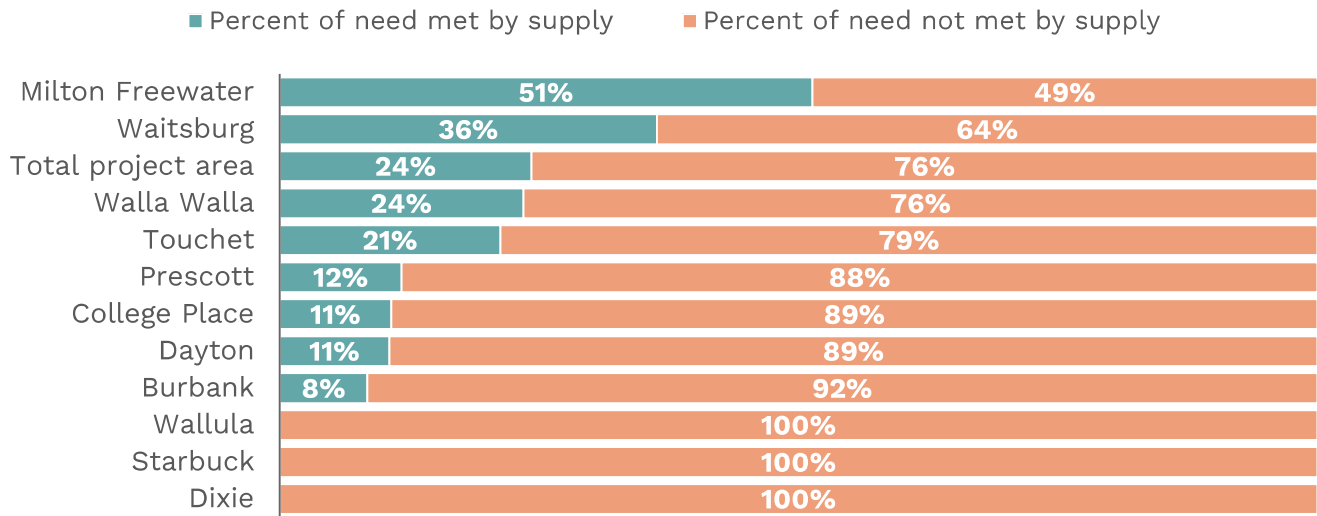
Priorities

As illustrated in Appendix B, subsidizing early learning and care for all children under 5 in the study area is an extremely expensive proposition. Therefore, we also identified three smaller priority populations to target as a feasible starting point for a pilot or incremental phase-in of a universal program. Based on interviews, secondary data, the results of 2021 “Creating an Accessible, Valley-Wide Child Care System Feasibility Study,” and discussion among the Elevate Work group, we identified infants, children from single-parent households, and children with disabilities as the priority populations with the most urgent need.

TABLE 12 | Total children, existing slots, and number of subsidized slots needed

Place	Age					Total
	<1	1	2	3	4	
Total children	768	800	813	832	850	4,064
Milton Freewater	113	118	120	123	125	600
Burbank	45	46	47	48	49	236
College Place	79	82	83	85	87	417
Dayton	32	33	34	35	36	170
Dixie	1	1	1	1	1	3
Prescott	32	33	34	35	36	170
Starbuck	2	3	3	3	3	13
Touchet	18	19	19	19	20	94
Waitsburg	10	11	11	11	11	55
Walla Walla	431	449	456	467	477	2,280
Wallula	5	5	5	5	5	26
Total existing public slots	36	78	79	348	446	987
Milton Freewater	16	47	47	99	99	308
Burbank	0	0	0	10	10	20
College Place	0	0	0	15	30	45
Dayton	0	0	0	9	9	18
Dixie	0	0	0	0	0	0
Prescott	0	0	0	10	10	20
Starbuck	0	0	0	0	0	0
Touchet	0	0	0	5	15	20
Waitsburg	0	0	0	10	10	20
Walla Walla	20	31	32	190	263	536
Wallula	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total subsidized slots needed	732	722	734	484	404	3,077
Milton Freewater	97	71	73	24	26	292
Burbank	45	46	47	38	39	216
College Place	79	82	83	70	57	372
Dayton	32	33	34	26	27	152
Dixie	1	1	1	1	1	3
Prescott	32	33	34	25	26	150
Starbuck	2	3	3	3	3	13
Touchet	18	19	19	14	5	74
Waitsburg	10	11	11	1	1	35
Walla Walla	411	418	424	277	214	1,744
Wallula	5	5	5	5	5	26

Figure 4 | Percent of child care need met and unmet by existing child care slot supply



INFANTS

While there were 768 infants (i.e., children 12 months old or younger) in the study area in 2020, there are currently only 93 slots to serve them. Due to lower staff-to-child ratio and other requirements, infant care is more intensive and expensive to provide than toddler and preschooler care. Infant care is expensive for parents and child care providers. The costs, needs, and challenges associated with expanding care for infants and toddlers in the study area are described in depth in the 2021 “Creating an Accessible, Valley-Wide Child Care System Feasibility Study.” The income generated by serving older toddlers and preschoolers often offsets the expense and makes it possible for providers to also serve infants.

Table 13 shows the total number, slots, and remaining need for infants and toddlers. As the table shows, infant care is only available in Walla Walla and Milton-Freewater.

CHILDREN FROM SINGLE-PARENT HOUSEHOLDS

There is a substantial number of single-parent households in the project area and a disproportionate number of children in these households experience poverty. In 2020, 7,820 households with children under 18 lived in the project area, 42.5% of whom had children under 6 years old (3,328 total).⁶ Seventy-two percent of households with children under 18 were led by married couples (5,601 total), while 21% were led by single mothers (1,674 total), and 7% were led by single fathers (545 total) (Table 14). Three out of four single parents in the project area are single mothers. The number of single-parent households varies throughout the project area with more than 85% of single-parent households led by women in Dayton, Milton-Freewater, Burbank, and College Place.

Single mothers in the project area experience poverty at greater rates than married-couple households (Table 15). Data for single fathers in poverty was not available.

TABLE 13 | Total children, child care slot supply, and remaining need by location and age

	Place	Infant (<1 year old)			Toddlers (1-2 years old)		
		Total children	Current child care supply	Remaining Need	Total children	Current child care supply	Remaining Need
WA	Columbia County						
	Dayton	32	0	32	67	0	67
	Starbuck	2	0	2	6	0	6
	Walla Walla County						
	Burbank	45	0	45	93	0	93
	College Place	79	0	79	165	0	165
	Dixie	1	0	1	2	0	2
	Prescott	32	0	32	67	0	67
	Touchet	18	0	18	38	0	38
	Waitsburg	10	0	10	22	0	22
	Walla Walla	431	20	411	905	63	842
Wallula	5	0	5	0	0	10	
OR	Umatilla County						
	Milton-Freewater	113	16	97	238	94	144
	Total project area	768	36	732	1,613	157	1,456

TABLE 14 | Families with children under 18 by county, town, and marital status, 2020

	Town	Total	Married-couple family household	Single-father household	Single-mother household
WA	Columbia County				
	Dayton	344	242	13	89
	Starbuck	0	0	0	0
	Walla County				
	Burbank	397	314	12	71
	College Place	930	724	31	175
	Dixie	11	0	0	11
	Prescott	232	182	16	34
	Touchet	190	172	13	5
	Waitsburg	189	154	7	28
	Walla Walla	4,075	2,891	381	803
Wallula	36	36	0	0	
OR	Umatilla County				
	Milton-Freewater	1,416	886	72	458

CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

In the study area, ECEAP, Early ECEAP, Head Start, Developmental Preschool, Transitional Kindergarten, and some private providers are contributing to meet early care and learning needs for children with disabilities. However, gaps and needs remain. Children with disabilities are systemically underserved by high-quality early education and child care programs in the United States.^{7,8}

As experts we interviewed pointed out, there is great diversity in disability types and impact and therefore there is a wide range of caregiving knowledge and supports needed that vary by child.⁹ Common supports needed to serve children with disabilities, depending on the child, include one-on-one or other specialized staff, medication, assistive technology or equipment, and behavioral intervention. For providers, serving children with disabilities can be more intensive and expensive due to investment in specialized staff, equipment, training, and possibly insurance.

Key informants summarized challenges affecting accessibility for parents and child care and early learning program providers.

TABLE 15 | Poverty rates of households with children under 18 by county and marital status, 2020

	Married-couple households	Single-mother households
Umatilla County	6.3%	42.1%
Columbia County	0.0%	10.1%
Walla Walla County	4.3%	35.2%

Challenges for parents and guardians from our interviews include difficulty finding a provider willing and qualified to provide specialized care; part-time programs, or funding insufficient to allow parents to work fulltime (for example, Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) Waivers are limited and not all families are eligible for them); and the need yet strain of advocating for children to be included in programs. Children with disabilities are more likely to be expelled from child care and early learning programs because the provider does not have readiness and capacity to meet their needs. Relying on independent care providers rather than an in-home or center-based program

Excerpt from Executive Director of the Walla Walla Valley Disability Network Cyndy Knight’s 2020 Washington State Senate Committee testimony:

“The lack of access to care for children/young adults with disabilities has been something that I have seen prior to the pandemic and continues to be a barrier. Child care centers cannot legally deny [children with disabilities] access, but they typically don’t take long to deny a child due to behavior challenges. Families, often single mothers, do not have the time to vet out centers, apply and then ultimately be turned away.

Money is needed to access care, but the money alone won’t be enough. Child care providers are not adequately trained or staffed to serve students with disabilities.... More investment and incentives are needed to increase training and capacity among care providers.”

can also be less reliable and unpredictable, as one parent explained, after doing all the work of identifying, preparing, and starting a caregiving arrangement, “they’re constantly quitting, or not showing up, or... it’s a stressful thing.”

Piecemeal, inconsistent, or no child care makes it difficult or impossible for parents to work the number of hours they need or at all. Furthermore, key informants highlighted that parents and guardians of children with disabilities are disproportionately single heads of household, adding to the logistical and economic complications and challenges. One key informant explained,

I think it’s a [misconception] of just the general public that kids are being taken care of if they have disabilities when that is just widely not true. They’re on waiting lists to get support.

In 2021, 30% of the 435 Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA)-eligible individuals in Walla Walla County and 33% of 36 DDA-eligible individuals in Columbia County did not receive a paid service nor case manager.¹⁰ Key informants emphasized gaps for middle-income families as well:

They also often assume that because you have a child with disability, you’re low income. That’s always a big assumption, and that’s not always the case. But in Walla Walla...Head Start and ECEAP are for typically low-income families... They now require that all families with children with disabilities apply for that first. And then if they don’t fall into the category of low income, then they provide them Developmental Preschool on the side. But if you want your child

included with other peers that are not disabled, then really it benefits you to be low income...otherwise you’re only in a room maybe with four or five others with not the same disability, [but] we’re always advocating for [inclusion].

Several key informants said outreach and relationship building is needed to help raise awareness and to motivate some families to participate in the programs and services for which they qualify. For example, some parents do not want their children to be labeled “disabled” or do not trust child care and other services to safely meet their child’s needs. Key informants emphasized that high-quality, age-appropriate care options are also needed for children with disabilities between the ages of 6 and 18.

Examples of additional existing programs

The *Walla Walla Valley Disability Network* (WWVDN) plays a variety of roles including advocacy, training, and connecting parents and guardians to services, programs, recreational and social opportunities, and each other. The WWVDN website (www.wwvdn.org) has an extensive directory of programs and resources for families, including related to accessing early learning and child care. The WWVDN currently has about 513 members, including families, professionals, and others based throughout the study area, including Milton-Freewater. Roughly 15% of families involved in the network identify as Spanish speaking.

The WWVDN has been partnering with other organizations to help increase the number of children with disabilities served by child care providers. For example, WWVDN recently partnered with Walla Walla County to host a

child care provider disability awareness training in English and Spanish by the University of Washington Haring Center for Inclusive Education. The training was well attended with 30-35 child care providers.

The Children's Home Society of Washington administers the *Parents as Teachers* program wherein trained professionals help guide parents from pregnancy to kindergarten through a home visiting model. DCYF *Early Achievers* provides coaches who help support and develop strategies to best serve and include children with disabilities rather than expelling them. However, not all child care providers participate in Early Achievers.

On the Washington side of the study area, the Education Service District (ESD) 123 *Birth-to-Three* early intervention program serves infants and toddlers who have a qualifying diagnosis with social-emotional, communication, motor, cognitive, and self-help developmental delays or disabilities through the school districts in Walla Walla and Columbia counties. The *Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education* program offered by the InterMountain ESD provides the comparable program for the Milton-Freewater area in Oregon. The ESD 123 *Birth-to-Three* program uses a parent coaching model and a team of speech-language, physical therapy, feeding therapy, autism sensory and behavioral support, and hearing and visual impairment service providers. Coordination of services is also part of the program. To qualify for services, children typically must have a diagnosed disability (common examples include down syndrome, autism, cerebral palsy, and hearing loss), a 25% delay or a negative 1.5 standard deviation in any developmental domain, or a clinical opinion.

The *Birth-to-Three* program also helps families develop a transition plan into public or private child care and early learning programs six months ahead of a child turning four.

The ESD 123 *Birth-to-Three* program has capacity to serve many more children. The program currently has budget to serve 200 children but only about 60 children in Walla Walla County are participating in the program, down substantially from 2019 due to a decrease in referrals. For example, the program currently serves nine children from College Place, down from roughly 35 in 2019. Furthermore, the program currently gets few referrals from the smaller, rural areas of the county. Sometimes children need support in one or more developmental delay or disability areas, but do not have a qualifying diagnosis so are not eligible for the services. Overall, there is a need to increase awareness of the ESD 123 *Birth-to-Three* and InterMountain ESD Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education programs and the importance of intervening as early as possible to support children with developmental delays rather than waiting to see if delays resolve themselves.

Another resource key informants mentioned is *Medicaid-funded respite care* for children with disabilities. Children who meet DDA eligibility criteria (and some with disabilities that do not meet DDA eligibility) often can receive funding to pay a third party to provide short-term care. To receive the funding, respite care providers must either be contracted through the Washington Department of Social and Health Services or be someone the primary caregiver knows and trusts who has met training and other eligibility requirements. Key informants

explained that this program helps, but gaps remain including that the funds are not enough to meet a full month of needed care; it can be difficult to find a caregiver eligible to receive funding; family members or other trusted potential caregivers must complete 70 hours of unpaid training before they can receive the funding, which can be prohibitive; and the caregiver must keep paperwork (e.g., timesheets), which can be burdensome for some. As Cyndy Knight, Executive Director of the WWVDN, explained to a Senate Committee in 2020: “Families are maxing out their DDA respite services in the first two weeks of the month, leaving the rest of the month to pay \$24 to \$40 an hour for specialized care.”

Addressing gaps and needs for children with disabilities

1. **When considering local dedicated fund and grant-supported programs, prioritize expanding access to and inclusion in early care and learning programs for children with disabilities.**

Children with disabilities would be a high-impact priority population to support through a children’s local dedicated fund or grants. Prioritizing access and affordability for children with disabilities would improve equity and be a feasible starting point as the population is relatively small, making it suitable for a pilot program or starting place for the incremental phase-in of a broader program.

2. **Support child care and early learning providers.** Options to help increase access to child care and early learning for children with disabilities include providing grants and financial supports

to providers of all kinds to help offset the costs of specialized staff, training, equipment, and accessibility-focused facility improvements.¹¹ An additional subsidy could support and incentivize private child care providers to build capacity and accept more children who require a higher level of care. There is potential for providers to more fully engage and collaborate with the parents to develop behavioral solutions, which does not always happen according to key informants. Several key informants believed a useful strategy would be to increase private providers’ access to coaching to help them develop behavioral solutions before making a formal complaint or expelling the child. An idea that came up in several key informant interviews is for school districts (or another entity) to expand providers’ access to mental health consultants they could call to “case conference” with when they need help developing strategies for supporting a child with behavioral challenges. The Holding Hope Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) program is already offered to licensed child care providers who participate in DCYF’s Early Achievers program and was recently expanded with Fair Start for Kids Act funding. The Holding Hope IECMHC program now has 15 mental health consultants serving Washington. A local dedicated fund or grant could support access to this type of consultation for child care providers who do not participate in Early Achievers. There is potential for the

ESD 123 Birth-to-Three program to partner with other groups to provide training for early educators and child care providers. For example, the Birth-to-Three program autism specialists could help provide professional development for better working with and including children with autism.

3. **Support parents of children with disabilities.** Supports could also target parents and guardians, through tuition subsidy or transportation assistance, for example. Some families cannot participate in half-day developmental preschool programs because they need a full-day option. Parents of children with disabilities may be more likely to rely on family and friends for child care due to preference or lack of other options that work well for them.¹² Increasing awareness of and access to Washington State Department of Child, Youth and Families subsidies and other resources for Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) providers could be useful for these families. A low-cost, easy-to-implement idea that arose in interviews was to develop a template parents could give child care and early learning providers to clearly, completely, and concisely share important information about their child and the child's needs. For example, the handout could include a basic summary of the child's specific needs and how to support them effectively, common situations that may be challenging for the child and how the family approaches them, and so forth.

4. **Increasing coordination will benefit children with disabilities.** Key informants thought continuing to improve coordination across child care and early learning programs would have the dual benefits of getting children into the public and private slots that best fit their needs while ensuring private and public programs are supported and sustained. Key informants raised a concern that some children who age out of the Birth-to-Three program do not then have a slot in ECEAP or TK, an issue that system-wide coordination could help address.
5. **Partner to increase outreach and participation in existing programs that benefit children with developmental delays and disabilities.** Key informants agreed there is need for increased, coordinated outreach to parents, primary care physicians, child care and early learning providers, and others to raise awareness of the importance of developmental screenings and early intervention for developmental delays and disabilities. Relatedly, parents, child care providers, and others engaged with young children need increased knowledge of how to identify the signs of autism, which is commonly misunderstood as bad behavior. There is a need to increase referrals, especially for children in the smaller, rural school districts, to take advantage of the ESD 123 Birth-to-Three program.

Endnotes

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