

APPENDIX G

Other Funding Strategies

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Introduction

This is Appendix G to the “Making affordable, high-quality early learning and care accessible to all children in the Walla Walla Valley” executive summary. The purpose of this appendix is to briefly summarize what school districts are doing to help address the “Big Goal” and to summarize employer strategies, including the Tri-Share case study.

School bonds and levies

Several school districts in the project area are providing early learning and care opportunities that are funded at least in part by their local bonds and levies. An important strategy to advance the Elevate Group’s “Big Goal” is to support existing and future school district efforts to raise funds for early learning and care programs. Passing bonds and levies requires local political support. Bonds are large funds generally used for construction or remodeling projects and are paid back over 15-25 years. In Washington, school bonds must legally meet two criteria to pass: 1) a 60% supermajority of voters must approve the measure and 2) “voter turnout must equal 40% of the voters who cast a ballot in the last general election.”¹ Levies are generally smaller, shorter-term funds used for necessities like technology, equipment, support staff, and facility maintenance.² In Washington, levies can only comprise up to 24% of a school district’s annual budget and require a simple majority to pass.

Table 39 presents what we know about project area school districts’ levy and bond status and plans as well as how their current

funding is supporting the “Big Goal.” In general, superintendents, principals, and other school district leaders we interviewed were not opposed to potential campaigns to establish local children’s dedicated funds. However, engaging them in a public children’s dedicated fund campaign, if one emerges, would be critical to ensure the effort supports and does not damage or disrupt school districts’ efforts that also require voter approval. Developing public dedicated funds at the county level could help reduce competition with school district levies and bonds.

Employer strategies

Without child care and early learning programs that meet employees’ needs, employers have a harder time attracting and retaining their workforce and productivity suffers. As one key informant said describing her group’s outreach to the business community:

Child care matters to you. When your employees have reliable child care, you have a reliable employee. So, helping businesses to see that child care is in their best interest. It's not just good for parents, it's actually good for your economy and your bottom line.

There are many ways employers can contribute to making high-quality early learning and care more affordable and available. For example, employers can provide dependent care flexible spending accounts, subsidies, reimbursements, or vouchers; pool resources with other employers and providers for shared early

TABLE 39 | Status of school district bonds and levies (for which we could attain information)

School district	Status	Focus	Early learning	Past voter support
Burbank	Just paid off bond, levy in 4-5 years	Burbank 900 new houses in 2025 = need bigger school	2 preschool classrooms at school (ECEAP & TK) = ~40 slots; hope for 3 rd classroom	2018 bond: 72%, which funded preschool & activities wing
College Place	Bond in 7-9 years	Building a new school to accommodate population growth, Early Learning Center facilities	ECEAP, TK, and Developmental Preschool, moving early learning programs to elementary school (12 portable classrooms)	High, but growing skepticism of public education since pandemic
Touchet	Bond in 2-3 years	Elementary facility, gym, media center improvements	ECEAP & TK programs are run by school district in elementary school	Moderately high
Starbuck	---	---	Has tax payer-supported, school district-sponsored preschool	---
Waitsburg	Last levy was 2016	Preschool, technology, maintenance, operations, athletics, etc.	20 half-day preschool slots (10 morning/10 afternoon) funded by levy; in process of remodeling house for 12-13 toddler child care slots	2016: 59%, which was ~8% lower than typical in past
Walla Walla	Recently passed \$120M bond	---	Center for Children & Families	Mixed

learning and care projects; or provide child care on site. These employer-focused strategies and more are described in depth in the 2021 “Employer Guide” and the “Creating an Accessible, Valley-Wide Child Care System” feasibility study, which are available here: earlylearningwallawalla.org/research/reports.

There is also a two-page flyer for employer outreach that summarizes the issues and how employers can help at the previous link and here: earlylearningwallawalla.org/images/Documents/WWELC_Employer_Flyer_V2.pdf

While employer strategies are not a universal solution and will not fully address the need, they can make a difference for a large number of households, do not require as much political investment as legislative asks or public dedicated funds, and are not constrained by geopolitical boundaries (i.e., the same employer strategy can serve employees regardless of where they live). Furthermore, increasing the number of employers that offer financial child care supports could decrease the number of households that need to be subsidized by a prospective local dedicated fund, potentially making the dedicated fund more viable.

In 2021, many Walla Walla Valley employers were interested in contributing to early learning and care solutions that would benefit their workforce, as evidenced by their engagement in the feasibility study process, including survey participation. It is worth reinvigorating these conversations and continuing to engage the business community and other employers to explore and implement strategies. Local chambers of commerce and employers who are already implementing their own options could be

good partners. For example, employers who are already offering child care supports could be compelling messengers for others interested in following suit. They may be willing to participate in meetings, panels, roundtables, or other events to share their motivations, experiences, challenges, strategies, and to answer questions from their peers. Furthermore, key informants believed support from the business community would be essential to passing voter-approved children’s dedicated funds.

Examples of local employers identified through this project and the 2021 feasibility study that offer employees early learning and care supports include the following:

- Columbia County Health System (CCHS) is responding to the need for child care in Dayton and broader Columbia County by remodeling what was formerly an assisted living facility into a new child care center. The center is planned to open in Fall 2023 and will provide 40 slots for CCHS employees and others. The center will be licensed and eligible to receive the Working Connections Child Care subsidy. The remodel has been funded by multiple sources, including public and private grants.
- The Army Corps of Engineers and the Jonathan M. Wainwright Memorial VA Medical Center were identified by key informants as examples of employers who offer their employees child care subsidies or stipends.
- A key informant in Oregon identified Boardman Foods, Inc. and Amazon as employers that offer their employees different types of child care supports

in nearby Morrow County:
“Boardman’s...business sector is super engaged through Port of Morrow. Boardman Foods [has] a child care program and they work with several of the other businesses, I think with Amazon, and they have a child care program where businesses help support the cost so the families don't bear the burden of the actual cost of child care.” It could be worth learning more about the model these employers and the Port of Morrow have developed.

Tri-Share Model: Employees, Employers, and the Public

Elevate Work Group members were interested in learning more about the Tri-Share public-private partnership model currently being piloted in Michigan wherein employers, employees, and the state contribute equally to paying early learning and care costs for eligible families.³ The Tri-Share program serves Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) households. As the program website explains, “Tri-Share aims to: (1) make child care affordable and accessible for working parents; (2) help employers retain and attract employees; and (3) help stabilize child care businesses.”

The program is administered by the Michigan Women’s Commission through “facilitator hubs” that act as liaisons between providers, employers, employees, and the state program across 12 regions. The hubs are led by different organizations, including United Way, school districts, Goodwill Industries, and others depending on the region. According to the program website, Tri-Share

is “occasionally supplemented with support from public and private foundations.”

In the Walla Walla Valley, there is potential to implement a similar model where employers pay a third, employees pay a third, and a local dedicated fund pays a third of costs for households the program deems eligible based on available resources. The Tri-Share case study is another example of how the Elevate Group might reduce the public share of a local early learning and care subsidy program to make it more feasible. A tradeoff of this approach is that it is not universal and does not support households that are unemployed, such as student-led households.

Endnotes

¹ Pierce County. *Bond and Levy Validation*.

<https://www.piercecountywa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/80/Bond-and-Levy-Validation?bidId=>

² Department of Revenue, Washington State. *Part 2: Excess levies and general obligation bonds*.

<https://dor.wa.gov/education/industry-guides/ballot-measure-requirements/part-2-excess-levies-and-general-obligation-bonds>

³ Michigan Women's Commission. *Affordable Child Care for Michigan Families*

<https://www.michigan.gov/mwc/initiatives/mi-tri-share-child-care>