

# LEAP

LEGISLATOR EDUCATION & ACTION PROJECT



## BUS TOUR REPORT

Current Status of Child Care in Washington State

[washingtonleap.org](http://washingtonleap.org)

*A collaboration between the Association of Washington  
Business Institute and Children's Campaign Fund Action*

# SUMMARY

- **The lack of affordable, accessible child care is a state-wide issue that requires all hands on deck to fix.** Across the state, families with children struggle to find affordable, accessible care. Lack of summer child care, after-school care, early morning child care, and transportation were identified as major problems across the state.
- **The high cost of child care means many parents and caregivers can't afford to work.** Business leaders spoke about the impact of the child care crisis on their ability to hire and retain staff.
- **Many child care centers and homes can't afford to hire and retain workers, creating a critical shortage of care.** Across the state, many providers cited low pay and lack of benefits as a major barrier to hiring staff. One participant said, "It's not that there is a lack of people who want to work with children. It's that there is a lack of people who can afford to."
- **Quality matters.** Many participants talked about the importance of high-quality early learning to prepare children for success in kindergarten and beyond. More assistance is needed to support the training and education of child care providers.
- **Communities are finding solutions.** Many people cited child care programs run by the Boys and Girls Clubs, the YMCA, YWCA, and local parks departments as successes in their communities. The Early Learning Facilities Fund and Imagine Institute were cited as valuable resources for expanding capacity and quality of care.
- **Businesses are looking for solutions.** Many employers expressed interest in calling on the Department of Commerce's technical assistance to explore strategies for supporting child care providers and employees. Companies currently offer FSAs, flexible scheduling, and hybrid work to accommodate family needs.
- **Providers, businesses, and advocates want to work together to find solutions.** In every community, participants recognize that child care is essential for communities to function – without affordable child care, parents cannot work or go to school, and businesses cannot hire and retain a workforce.

To view the resources compiled for the bus tour, please visit [washingtonleap.org/resources](https://www.washingtonleap.org/resources).

# ABOUT THE TOUR

Through the Legislator Education and Action Program (LEAP) developed by The Association of Washington Institute (AWBi) and the Children's Campaign Fund Action (CCFA), the two organizations embarked on a statewide tour to promote education of and provide information about early learning and child care. The goal was to provide elected officials, business leaders, policy makers and stakeholders with information about early learning and child care and hear from communities about the issues, problems, and successes in their areas. We held regional meetings at different stops to gather information about the state of child care in our state.

## ON THE BUS

Attendees on the bus included board members and staff from CCFA/CCF, AWBi staff, Rep. Lisa Callan, and Paige Coleman from the Department of Commerce. Across all stops, over 200 people registered for round tables and rallies at child care centers. We reached out to local lawmakers, business leaders, child care providers and early learning advocates to invite them to participate in the tour.

## OUR STOPS

We traveled to nine Congressional districts, traveling over 800 miles. We visited fourteen sites in all nine Congressional districts :

- Olympia
- Tacoma
- Seattle
- Mount Vernon
- Wenatchee
- Spokane
- Walla Walla
- Pasco
- Toppenish
- Vancouver





# DAY 1: OLYMPIA, TACOMA, SEATTLE



**Kids Co.  
Seattle**



**Lincoln Options  
Olympia**



**Pathways Enrichment  
Tacoma**

We started the bus tour with a stop at Lincoln Options in Olympia. Lincoln Options provides summer care for students, which was a major gap that was identified on the tour. Since schools and most pre-schools close during the summer, families often scramble to find camps or alternative care.

In Tacoma, we visited Pathways Enrichment, a center that accepts Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) subsidies, provides assistance for military families through the government program Military Child Care, and supports ECEAP and Head Start. The center owner, Mary Curry, spoke about the financial difficulties of running a center that accepts subsidies from families. She introduced her husband as her fiscal sponsor. We held a roundtable at the Tacoma-Pierce County Chamber of Commerce, where we spoke with business leaders, lawmakers and other early learning advocates.

In Seattle, we visited Kids Co., which offers a scholarship for families. Dick's Drive In Restaurants President Jasmine Donovan spoke about how their business offers employees between \$5,000-\$9,000 in childcare assistance.

# SUE KRIENEN EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE CENTER



## DAY 2: MOUNT VERNON, WENATCHEE

In Mount Vernon, we toured the Sue Krienen Early Learning & Childcare Center, which was built with funds raised through Skagit Valley College, the Early Learning Facilities Fund at the Department of Commerce, and Head Start. The Center is located across the street from the college and has an observation space for SVC's Early Childhood Education students. At the roundtable, community members and advocates discussed the need for affordable child care, transportation for child care, living wages for providers, and providing culturally appropriate care as critical issues for the area.

In Wenatchee, we visited EPIC, a center that serves ECEAP students, Head Start, Migrant Head Start, Early Head Start, and students with special needs. Current challenges EPIC faces include eligibility requirements, finding qualified staff, and lack of funding flexibility.



**“There’s no shortage of people who want to work with children. There’s a shortage of the people who can afford to work with children.”**

**-Alexis Meyers, Department Chair of Skagit Valley College Early Childhood Education**



# DAY 3: SPOKANE, WALLA WALLA



The Lilac City Early Learning Center is located in an apartment complex, which provides convenience for families and teachers. In Spokane, like many other places on the tour, affordability, lack of child care slots and availability were major problems mentioned by community members during our Spokane roundtable.

We stopped at the Little Angels Bio-Dome Daycare and Pre-school, which provides hands-on learning activities such as gardening, farm visits, and culinary activities. Their ECE Farm to School program also integrates food-related education into the curriculum. The severe shortage of staff was a major problem cited at Little Angels in part because the program has lost several qualified staff to the local school district.





# DAY 4: TRI-CITIES, TOPPENISH

The bus pulled into Esvieda's (My First Step Daycare) in Pasco, an in-home care program that accepts WCCC subsidies. During the roundtable, the Tri-Cities business community spoke about the difficulty of finding care during nontraditional hours -- specifically, the Hanford 4-10 shifts. Additionally, one winery manager said their winery is trying to build an all-female management team, but child care is one of the biggest barriers to doing so. He and his wife are trying to build a daycare in their winery for their employees to accommodate their needs. They would like to explore opening a child care center in their winery.

In Toppenish, we visited Heritage University Early Learning Center, on the campus of Heritage University. There, we discussed the need for high-quality training for teachers at child care centers and homes as teaching a zero to age five curriculum is different from teaching kindergarten or elementary school. Specific challenges the greater Yakima community is facing include the lack of child care in the early morning hours to accommodate farm workers' schedules, medical professionals leaving the community because of the lack of child care, and the processing plant losing swing shift workers and managers because of the lack of child care.



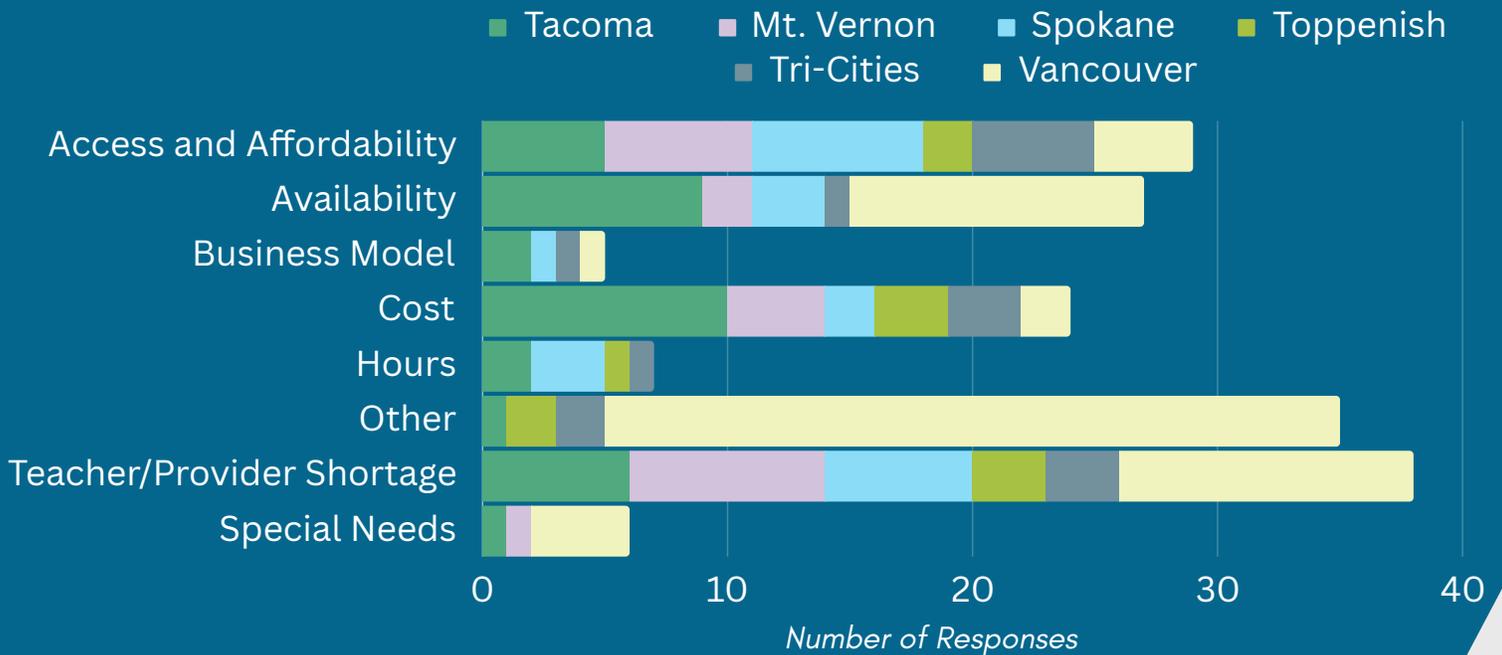
# DAY 5: VANCOUVER



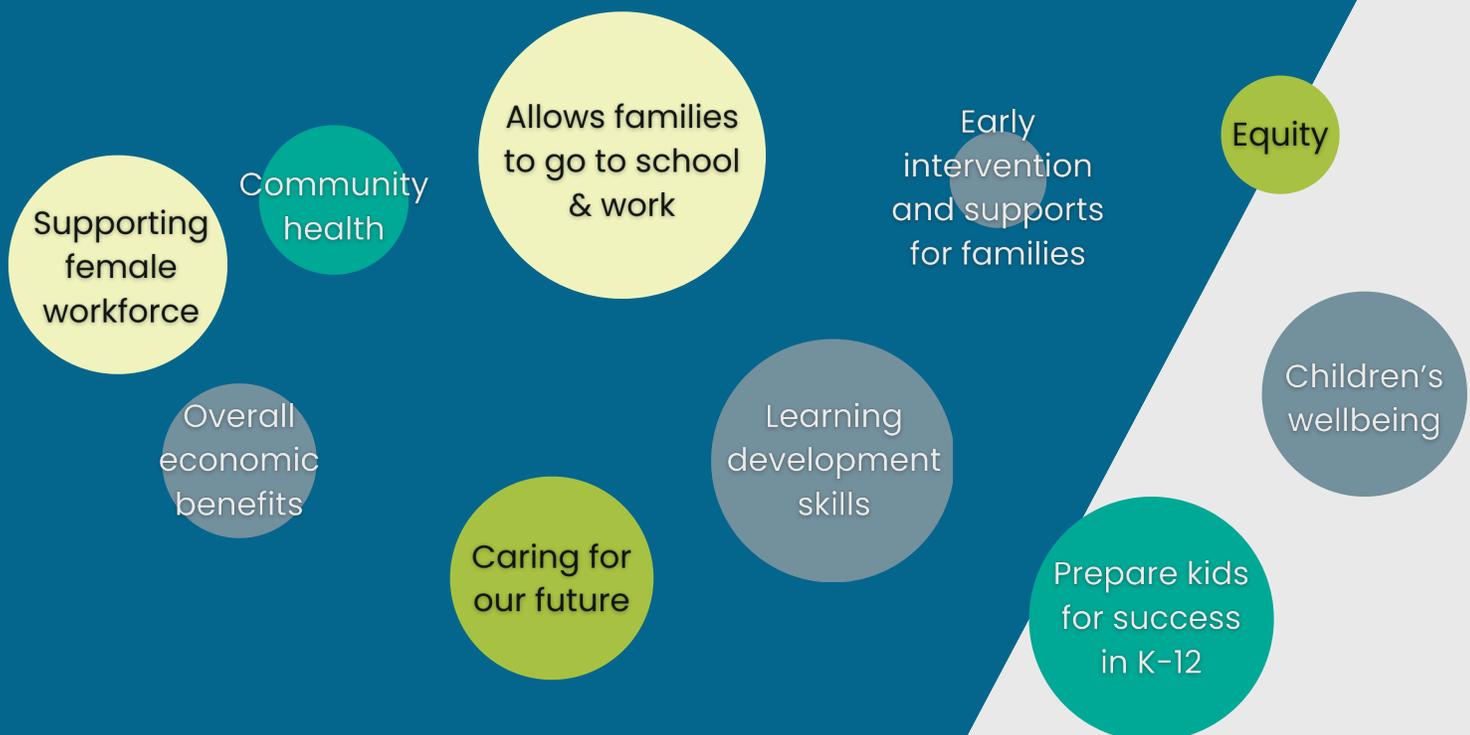
On our last day of the tour, we visited Educational Opportunities for Children and Families (EOCF), which offers Early Head Start, Head Start, and ECEAP. EOCF also accepts WCCC subsidies. During a well-attended roundtable at the Greater Vancouver Chamber of Commerce, child care providers and business leaders highlighted the fact that child care centers and homes are small businesses that are important contributors to the local economy. The business community is working with the child care community to develop innovative ways to support child care. A success that was mentioned in the community was Parent University at Clark College, which is a grant-supported effort that gives parents the opportunity to enroll in a family life class. From the audience, suggested policies proposed to help with the child care crisis were more resources for immigrant staff and families, affordable housing, parity and benefits on par with K-12 education, a tiered system for subsidies, and a workforce tax credit like the long-term care tax credit.

# STATEWIDE CHALLENGES

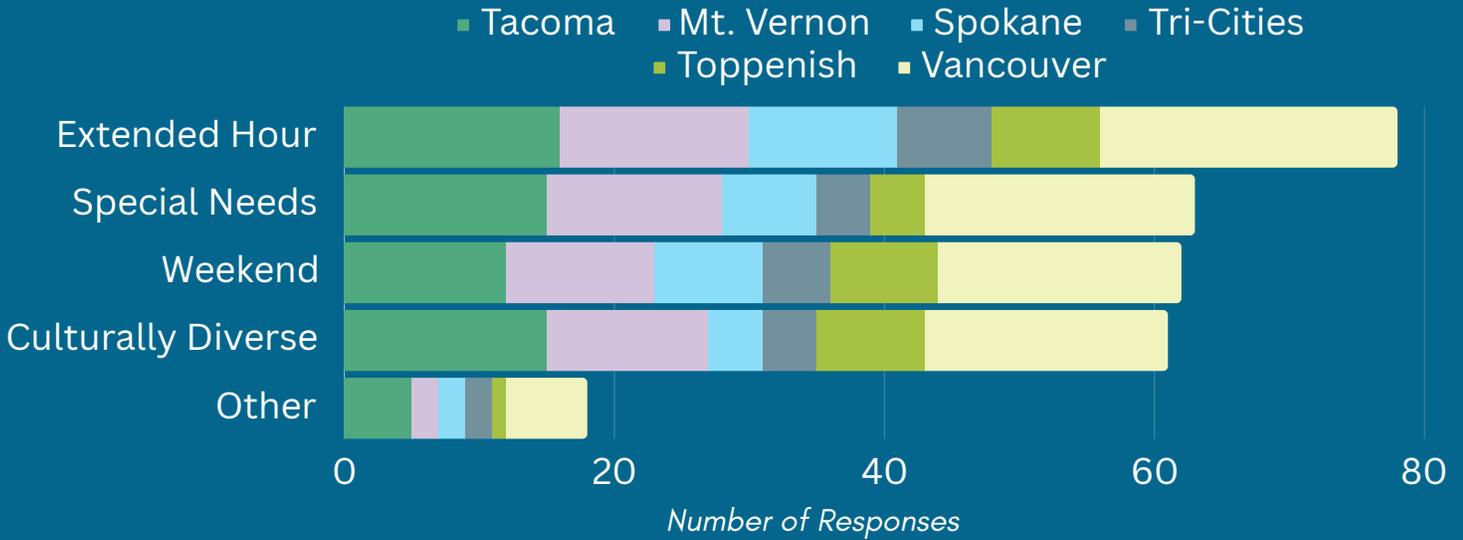
## WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE IN CHILD CARE IN YOUR COMMUNITY?



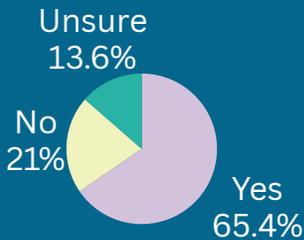
## WE ASKED PEOPLE WHY EARLY LEARNING IS IMPORTANT. HERE'S WHAT THEY SAID:



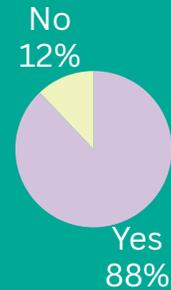
# IS THERE A NEED FOR ALTERNATIVE CARE IN YOUR COMMUNITY?



## HAVE YOU LOST EMPLOYEES BECAUSE OF THE LACK OF CHILD CARE?



## DO YOU HAVE EMPLOYEES WHO ARE HAVING A DIFFICULT TIME FINDING CHILD CARE?



## HERE ARE SOME POLICIES WORKPLACES ARE IMPLEMENTING TO ACCOMODATE CHILD CARE NEEDS:

- Flex time
- Paid family leave & paternity leave
- Bringing kids to work
- Employer subsidies for employee child care
- Flexible Spending Accounts
- Remote work
- Shorter work week

# STATEWIDE POLICY SOLUTIONS

WE ASKED PEOPLE WHAT POLICIES THEY WOULD PROPOSE. HERE'S WHAT THEY SAID.

Wage assistance to attract highly qualified staff

Funding for infrastructure, salaries, and benefits

Provide child care assistance to middle class families

Tax credits to help with start up costs, tax credit for businesses who offer child care

More mental health supports for providers

Incentivizing providing infant and toddler classrooms

Increasing availability for in-office child care

Increasing reimbursement rates

Child care near businesses; options for employers to participate in child care

Working Connections Subsidy Advocates

Child tax credit; more financial support to families

Better background check process

More supports and resources for children's needs

State assistance to limit the amount of child care expenses for families

Support for immigrant families

Regulation continuity, resolving conflicts between state and local licensing entities (fire departments, etc.)

EBT for kiddos during summer months

Child care near transit



## READ MORE:

- **Washington Standard**: Business leaders hit the road to press for more child care investment, by Laurel Demkovich (8/1/23)
- **Skagit Valley Herald**: Child care bus tour visits Mount Vernon, by Emma Fletcher-Frazer (8/2/23)
- **KEPR - Pasco**: Childcare advocacy campaign makes stop in Pasco, by Allen Leister (8/3/23)
- **The Columbian**: Lawmakers, business leaders rally in Vancouver in support of child care, by Griffin Reilly (8/4/23)
- **The Chronicle**: Commentary: The wheels on the bus go round and round to raise awareness of child care challenges, by Kris Johnson (8/4/23)
- **The Seattle Times**: We must meet the challenge of saving child care, by Rep. Ruth Kagi (Ret.), Alex Galeana, and Amy Anderson (9/14/23)

## THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS!



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