2026 Cost of Quality Child Care and Market Rate Study Report Brief

The Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) has published the 2026 Cost of Quality Child Care and Market Rate Study. This report brief gives an overview of survey response rates and market rate data from the study.

About the Study

- DCYF publishes a new study every two years.
- The study includes updated market rates and cost data.
- Data is collected by surveying licensed child care providers.
- Providers are asked about the rates they charge families in the private market, and the cost to operate high-quality child care.

How It's Used

The Washington state Legislature uses the study to set provider reimbursement base rates for the Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) program. Currently the Legislature sets rates based on market rates, but the study supports the Legislature's option to set rates based on cost as well.

Response Rates

HB 2689 requires that future market rate studies meet regional provider response rate minimums. Due on June 1, 2028, the next study requires:

- A response rate of at least 40% per region.
- Each region's response rate greater than it was in 2026.

Response Rate by Region or Provider Type

Region or Provider Type	Response Rate
Region 1	45.52%
Region 2	38.22%
Region 3	48.95%
Region 4	26.66%
Region 5	46.17%
Region 6	57.86%
Spokane	59.83%
Statewide	38.52%
Licensed Child Care Center	65.75%
Licensed Family Home	29.03%

Market Rates

Current rates are based on data from the 2024 study and are set at the 85th percentile of the 2024 market rate. The 2026 study shows that market rates have increased. The Legislature can use information from the study to decide on future rate changes.

The tables below show the difference between current monthly rates and the 75th and 85th percentiles of the new 2026 market rate study. Amounts in parentheses mean that the current rate is more than the rate in the 2026 study.

Difference between current Licensed Family Home Subsidy Rates based on 2024 Market Rate and 2026 75th and 85th Percentile Rates

Region	Infant	Toddler	Preschool	School-Age
Region 1, 75th percentile	$280.00	$180.00	$224.92	$80.00
Region 1, 85th percentile	$440.00	$440.00	$374.92	$156.53
Region 2, 75th percentile	$188.50	$159.94	$199.92	$220.00
Region 2, 85th percentile	$340.00	$270.96	$299.92	$500.00
Region 3, 75th percentile	$96.00	$300.06	$210.00	$100.00
Region 3, 85th percentile	$794.00	$500.06	$460.00	$428.40
Region 4, 75th percentile	$275.40	$83.22	$150.00	$21.62
Region 4, 85th percentile	$375.90	$214.72	$220.00	$166.62
Region 5, 75th percentile	$99.98	$210.00	$110.00	$416.72
Region 5, 85th percentile	$199.98	$290.00	$295.00	$466.72
Region 6, 75th percentile	$0.00	$301.92	$115.92	**$(216.68)**
Region 6, 85th percentile	$199.98	$483.32	$232.33	**$(116.68)**
Spokane, 75th percentile	$143.00	$110.00	$220.00	$100.00
Spokane, 85th percentile	$918.00	$170.00	$850.00	$110.00

Difference between current Center Subsidy Rates based on 2024 Market Rate and 2026 75th and 85th Percentile Rates

Region	Infant	Toddler	Preschool	School-Age
Region 1, 75th percentile	**$(201.00)**	$290.00	$430.00	$707.00
Region 1, 85th percentile	$100.00	$310.00	$530.00	$707.00
Region 2, 75th percentile	**$(74.00)**	**$(210.00)**	$260.00	$54.00
Region 2, 85th percentile	$126.00	**$(10.00)**	$360.00	$54.00
Region 3, 75th percentile	$540.00	$55.00	**$(210.00)**	**$(230.00)**
Region 3, 85th percentile	$1,317.00	$958.00	$342.00	**$(13.00)**
Region 4, 75th percentile	$25.00	$140.00	**$(550.00)**	**$(73.00)**
Region 4, 85th percentile	$325.00	$470.00	**$(150.00)**	**$(41.00)**
Region 5, 75th percentile	$85.00	$55.00	$55.00	$46.00
Region 5, 85th percentile	$190.00	$183.00	$55.00	$102.00
Region 6, 75th percentile	**$(120.00)**	$42.00	**$(5.00)**	$61.00
Region 6, 85th percentile	$40.00	$132.00	$95.00	$145.00
Spokane, 75th percentile	$65.00	$245.00	$220.00	$416.00
Spokane, 85th percentile	$130.00	$320.00	$260.00	$632.00

Key Takeaways

While some current rates are higher than 75th percentile of 2026 market rates, the majority are not. Based on 2026 study findings, state investment would be needed to update base rates to align with 75th percentile of 2026 market rates. An even greater investment would be needed to align rates with 85th percentile of 2026 market rates.