



## 2024 Fair Start for Kids Act (FSKA) Recommendation Report



Washington State Department of  
**CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES**

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## Summary

The 2024 Fair Start for Kids Act (FSKA) Recommendation Report outlines the findings and recommendations produced by the Early Learning Advisory Committee (ELAC), in conjunction with the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF), regarding the phased implementation of FSKA strategies and priorities pursuant to RCW [43.216.075\(2\)\(b\)](#) and [43.216.772](#).

Specifically, this report is required to provide recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature related to DCYF's phased implementation of FSKA strategies and priorities. The recommendations focus on critical areas for strengthening the Early Childhood Education (ECE) system. These recommendations are categorized into six key areas: Funding and Grant Opportunities; Mental Health; Enhancing Provider Recruitment and Retention; Professional Development; and Compensation and Engagement Strategies.

The recommendations emphasize the need for stable and sustainable funding to support the entire ECE system, including competitive wages, equitable grant opportunities, and expanded language access. They also highlight the importance of addressing complex mental health needs, improving provider retention, enhancing professional development, and adopting a more flexible and inclusive approach to provider workforce recruitment. These efforts are aimed at creating a more robust and equitable early learning environment that benefits children, families, and providers.





## Background

The Legislature established the Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC) to advise the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) on statewide early learning issues that contribute to the ongoing efforts of building a comprehensive system of quality early learning programs and services for Washington's young children and families. ELAC membership includes parents, child care providers, health and safety experts, legislators, representatives of tribal nations, independent schools, K-12 and higher education, and others who are interested in creating a statewide early learning system that helps all children realize their full potential. Members meet regularly throughout the year to provide input and recommendations to DCYF.

This report contains legislative recommendations and highlights recommendations ELAC has provided to DCYF in its advisory capacity. The objective of each recommendation is to deepen the impact of the policy objectives underpinning the Fair Start for Kids Act, which are as follows:

- Advancing racial equity and strengthening families by recognizing and responding to the growing diversity of our state's population.
- Promoting access to affordable, high-quality child care and early learning opportunities for all families, paying particular attention to the needs of rural and other underserved communities.
- Promoting kindergarten readiness by enhancing child development, including development of social-emotional skills, and eliminating exclusionary admissions practices and disproportionate removals in child care and early learning programs.
- Contributing to efforts to strengthen and grow our state's economy by supporting working parents as well as stabilizing and supporting the childcare and early learning workforce.

## Introduction

[The Fair Start for Kids Act](#) requires ELAC to work in conjunction with DCYF to annually report recommendations related to implementation strategies and priorities.<sup>1</sup> These recommendations focus on:

- Funding and Grant Opportunities
- Mental Health
- Enhancing Provider Recruitment and Retention
- Professional Development
- Compensation and Engagement Strategies

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<sup>1</sup> [RCW 43.216.075\(2\)\(b\)](#)

The FSKA Recommendation Report offers insights and highlights critical areas for reform to better serve and support children, families, and providers.

## Washington's Child Care and Early Learning Landscape

DCYF estimates that approximately 302,000 children between the ages of birth to 5 years (B-5) require child care while their parents work.<sup>2</sup> However, only approximately 29% of children B-5 are served by Washington's mixed child care delivery system.<sup>3</sup> For school-age children (kindergarten to age 12 or K-12), the gap in child care is even larger, with only approximately 12% receiving the care they require.<sup>4</sup> This highlights a critical shortage across the state.

- Licensed Capacity (or the amount of licensed child care available): 198,200 spaces.<sup>5</sup>
- Subsidized Child Care: serving approximately 51,000 children (approximately 42% ages B-5 and 5% ages 6-12) and approximately 30,000 families.<sup>6</sup>
  - Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) Providers: Serving approximately 4,000 children through subsidy benefits.
- State Funded Preschool:<sup>7</sup>
  - Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP): 16,778 slots
  - Early ECEAP: 178 slots
  - Head Start: 13,491 slots

DCYF has made tremendous efforts and strides in operationalizing FSKA strategies and priorities by advancing affordability, accessibility, and high-quality in administered child care and early learning programing and implementation through expanded access, capped copays, and more robust supports for providers.

The report outlines recommendations for the Governor and the Legislature to consider and to ensure adequate funding for FSKA critical investments. Ensuring DCYF has adequate authority and funding to operationalize these recommendations will ensure implementation that will lead to improved outcomes for children by expanding access, more coordinated high-quality child care,

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<sup>2</sup> Child Care and Early Learning Need and Supply Dashboard. April 2024 release. Retrieved from <https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/practice/oiaa/reports/early-learning-dashboards/child-care-needsupply-data>

<sup>3</sup> Child Care and Early Learning Need and Supply Dashboard. April 2024 release. Retrieved from <https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/practice/oiaa/reports/early-learning-dashboards/child-care-needsupply-data>

<sup>4</sup> Child Care and Early Learning Need and Supply Dashboard. April 2024 release. Retrieved from <https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/practice/oiaa/reports/early-learning-dashboards/child-care-needsupply-data>

<sup>5</sup> Child Care Subsidy Uptake Dashboard <https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/practice/oiaa/reports/early-learning-dashboards/subsidy-takeup>

<sup>6</sup> Child Care Subsidy Uptake Dashboard <https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/practice/oiaa/reports/early-learning-dashboards/subsidy-takeup>

<sup>7</sup> ECEAP and Head Start Uptake Dashboard <https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/practice/oiaa/reports/early-learning-dashboards/eceap-headstart-dashboard>

and enhancing supports for families and providers. By implementing these strategies, the ECE system can better meet the diverse needs of children and families, providing a more equitable and effective early learning environment across the state.

## ELAC Members

ELAC members are a diverse group of people who advise DCYF on policy development and implementation that promotes alignment of private and public sector actions, objectives, and resources, ensuring school readiness.

ELAC includes parents, child care providers, health and safety experts, legislators, community partners, and representatives from tribal nations, independent schools, K-12, and higher education. Members work together to advise on a statewide early learning system that helps all children realize their full potential and are kindergarten ready.

## A Big Thank You to Our Members and the Public

We extend our deepest gratitude to all ELAC members and members of the public who actively participated in the report development meetings. Your invaluable contributions have played a crucial role in shaping the report’s recommendations. The dedication and collaborative spirit you brought to this process were instrumental in crafting the strategies and actions that will guide our future work. ***Thank you for your commitment to this important endeavor.***

## Member List for Reference

For convenience, here is a list of ELAC members who played a key role in developing these recommendations:

ELAC Representative	ELAC Seat
Cheryl Smith	Department of Commerce
Astrid Newell	Washington State Department of Health
Ami Magisos	Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC)
Olivia Burley	<a href="#"><u>Military spouse liaison created within the Department of Veterans Affairs under RCW 43.60A.245</u></a>
Samantha Bowen	Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)
Representative Travis Couture	House of Representatives – Republican
Representative Mari Leavitt	House of Representatives – Democrat
Senator Claire Wilson	Senate – Democrat
Shereese Rhodes	Parent serving on DCYF’s Parent Advisory Group (PAG)
Valisa Smith	Private-Public Partnership created in RCW <a href="#"><u>43.216.065</u></a>
Colleen Condon	Early Learning Regional Coalition
Debbie Ham	Early Learning Regional Coalition
Susan Yang	<a href="#"><u>The Washington State Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs established under chapter 43.117 RCW</u></a>

Carlina Brown-Banks	The Washington State Commission on African American Affairs established under chapter <a href="#">43.113 RCW</a>
Alexandra Martin-Truesdell	<a href="#">The Washington State Commission on Hispanic Affairs established under chapter 43.115 RCW</a>
Grace Yoo	<a href="#">The Washington State Women's Commission established under chapter 43.119 RCW</a>
Michelle Perez	<a href="#">The Washington State Office of Equity established under chapter 43.06D RCW</a>
Lola Moses	Sovereign Tribal Government
Waylon Ballew	Sovereign Tribal Government – Tribal ECEAP or Head Start Program (IPEL)
Jen Sandvig	Washington Federation of Independent Schools (WFIS)
Mary Rulewicz	Washington Library Association
Lois Martin	Statewide Advocacy Coalition of Organizations that focuses on Early Learning
Luz Gomez	Advocacy organization for immigrants and refugees
Isis Lara Fernandez	Organization advocating for expanded learning opportunities and school-age child care programs
Kimberly Hoover	Largest union representing child care providers
Million Shiferaw	Head Start, Early Head Start, or Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Program
Julie Rolling	Educational Service Districts
Ryan Guzman	A provider responsible for programs under section 619 of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
Valerie Arnold	State agency responsible for part C of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
Danielle Rasmussen	Representative of the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program
Aida Rodriguez	Representative of licensed family home providers
Bryana Kowalski	An infant or early childhood mental health expert
Kathy Carman	Representative of child care centers
Deeann Puffert	Representative of the statewide Child Care Resource and Referral Organization
Enrica Hampton	Early Learning Regional Coalition - King County
Claudette Lindquist	Early Learning Regional Coalition - Central
Debbie Carlsen	Early Learning Regional Coalition - Northwest
Colleen Condon	Early Learning Regional Coalition - Northeast
Debbie Ham	Early Learning Regional Coalition - Southwest
Ruba Ayub	Early Learning Regional Coalition - Pierce County
Heidi Scott	Early Learning Regional Coalition - Olympic-Kitsap Peninsula
Brittany Hartikainen	Early Learning Regional Coalition - Southeast
Nancy Spurgeon	Early Learning Regional Coalition - North Central
Gary Burris	Early Learning Regional Coalition - West Central

## Methodology

The recommendations in this report were developed through a series of structured sessions, meetings, and discussions conducted during ELAC's Report Development meetings. These sessions were held on March 5, May 14, July 9, and Aug. 6, 2024, with the aim of gathering comprehensive feedback on various aspects of the child care system.

The data collected during these sessions were meticulously analyzed to identify common themes and formulate actionable recommendations. Participants engaged in various activities such as Jamboard exercises, Google Docs collaborations, and were provided materials and presentations. These collaborative efforts culminated in a set of refined recommendations, with ongoing discussions to ensure alignment with the overall goals and FSKA recommendation report requirements.

The FSKA Recommendation Report serves as a culmination of these efforts, providing a structured overview of the key findings and suggested actions. Additional resources, including presentation slides and relevant documents, are available for further review through the provided links.

## Recommendations Summary

The following recommendations are grouped into six broad categories, aligned with the spending goals and strategies outlined in the Fair Start for Kids Act ([RCW 43.216.772](#)). A summary of these categories is provided below:

- Funding and Grant Opportunities
- Improving Language Access
- Mental Health Supports
- Provider Recruitment and Retention
- Professional Development
- Compensation and Engagement Strategies

## Full Findings Summary

The detailed list of recommendations within each category is as follows.

## Funding and Grant Opportunities

### Funding

- Provide stable funding for the entire ECE system to support its proper functioning and sustainability. This includes:



- Making the system fully sustainable, regardless of the funding source, to fund increased provider compensation and family affordability, and fund rates that compensate at or near the full cost of providing high quality child care.
- Fully fund the new federal requirements regarding child care subsidies - enrollment based pay and paying on the first of the month, prospective payment.

## Grants

- Create more grant funding opportunities that encourage cross-collaboration and are less competitive and more equitable.
- Provide frequent and small-dollar facility grants to support family home start-up and expansion, for example expansion of the 'Business Start Up Series.'

## Improving Language Access

- Increased funding to incentivize dual language learner training, expand training opportunities, and increase the number of bilingual and bicultural trainers.
- Ensure adequate funding to allow the department to provide language access based on identified needs supported by statewide data.
- Increased funding to ensure human translation and interpretation of all early care and education information provided by DCYF beyond two language access coordinators, to support culturally responsive translation and reduce the use of Google Translate.

## Mental Health: Complex Needs and Behavioral Health

- Increased funding to increase the number of specialists in classrooms to support complex needs and behavioral health.
- Additional funding is essential to address the behavioral and mental health needs of infants and young children in early learning classrooms, including support for managing complex needs and disruptive behaviors in various licensed provider settings.
- Access to high-quality substitutes for licensed child care providers with a specialty in behavioral and complex needs.
- Provide enhanced training and financial incentives for all child care providers across various settings, emphasizing complex needs and behavioral health.
- Allocate funding for outreach initiatives aimed at parents, caregivers, and families to raise awareness about behavioral health and complex needs resources and programs.
- RCW 43.216.772: Enhancing Support for Children with Disabilities Across Early Childhood and School-Based Programs: Early childhood education (ECE) providers encounter significant challenges in supporting children with disabilities, particularly in bridging the gap between early intervention (0-2 years) and school-based programs for those with an Individualized Education Program (IEP). For instance, a student with a

one-on-one paraprofessional in kindergarten should receive similar support in their after-school childcare program. Child care providers must have access to the necessary training, resources, and inclusion in the planning process, including data sharing and IEP development. However, there are disconnects in funding and data collection between early learning and care (administered by DCYF) and K-12 education (overseen by OSPI). To better support these children, funding structures need to be aligned, and strategies between agencies must be coordinated to ensure consistent support across all learning environments, including childcare. Addressing the current lack of services and funding is essential to creating a seamless support system that follows the child through all their educational settings.

## Enhancing Provider Recruitment and Retention

- Increase funding to ensure increased wages to compensate for education, experience, and competency for providers, assistant directors and directors. It supports wage equity as a retention strategy and ensures a pathway for increased wages with further education, experience, and competency for providers.
- Consider funding DCYF to conduct a retention study to understand why providers leave the ECE field.
- Consider either fully funding the Cost of Quality Care where rates would be inclusive of health care coverage or fully funding rates that achieve the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile of market plus an adder for health care coverage.

## Enhancing Professional Development for Providers

- Provide increased funding to make all mandatory training in multiple formats (e.g., on demand and virtual), including Child Care Basics, a consistent and sustainable, program that is offered at no cost, is readily available, and is easy to access.
- Recommendations for funding to ensure professional development requirements are inclusive and ensure they are culturally and linguistically accessible and accommodate providers with learning differences or neurodivergence.
- Legislative changes to Extended Compliance Timelines for staff qualification in RCW 43.216.755.
- Increased and expanded funding to support professional development through tuition reimbursement, scholarship grants/programs, technical assistance, and coaching.

## Compensation and Engagement Strategies

- Amend the membership requirements detailed in [RCW 43.216.075](#) to adopt a more flexible approach to recruitment for ELAC seats. Instead of tying eligibility strictly to organizational affiliations and specified appointing authorities, it would be beneficial to

broaden the recruitment criteria to include individuals based on their expertise in relevant fields and subject matter. This approach will ensure that DCYF and ELAC benefit from a diverse range of knowledgeable contributors who are committed to fully participating in ELAC, making the recruitment process easier and more flexible, while enhancing the early learning system.

- Fully fund DCYF to compensate early learning participants for their lived expertise/experience in alignment to the 2023-2024 session [House Bill 1541, Establishing the nothing about us without us act.](#)

## Conclusion

The recommendations outlined in this report address critical areas necessary for strengthening the ECE system.

By securing stable and sustainable funding, expanding grant opportunities, improving language access, and enhancing mental health support, the ECE system can better meet the needs of children, families, and providers.

Additionally, focusing on provider recruitment, retention, and professional development will ensure a well-equipped and dedicated workforce. Finally, adopting more flexible recruitment strategies and compensating early learning participants for their lived expertise in community engagement will enrich the system with diverse perspectives.

These collective efforts aim to build a more robust, equitable, and effective early learning environment that supports the well-being and development of all children across the state, ensuring kindergarten readiness.

## Appendix: Out-of-Scope Recommendations for FSKA Report

The following recommendations were not included in the main body of this report because either the following recommendations were not within the scope per RCW [43.216.075\(2\)\(b\)](#), relating to the phased implementation of FSKA strategies and priorities, or where specifically directed to DCYF on process improvements. Although not within scope, these recommendations are important when considering investments and statutory changes in early care and education programs.

### Grants

- Streamline the application process to enhance accessibility and cultural relevance for diverse populations, including providing adequate timelines for tribal entities to complete their approval processes.
- Address barriers such as the requirement for providers with ECEAP slots to apply through their contractors, who may only apply for ECEAP slots and not for other children, thereby complicating matters for mixed delivery providers attempting to serve ECEAP students.
- Grant funding should include sufficient resources for the department to provide technical services for application assistance, including access to grant writers for child care providers.

### Improving Language Access

- Prioritize hiring DCYF staff who speak the languages of the communities they serve.
- Translation should occur simultaneously with the release of English materials (i.e., transcreation).
- Funding to increase opportunities for training and onboarding of translators and interpreters to meet fluctuating demand related to early care and education. It is crucial that translators and interpreters possess content knowledge and expertise to accurately translate and interpret.

### Mental Health: Complex Needs and Behavioral Health

Requesting equitable access to ESIT services in inclusive early care and education settings for working parents/guardians of children with developmental delays and or disabilities.

### Enhancing Provider Recruitment and Retention

Consider funding caregiver wellness, in addition to supporting professional development. Examples include access to breaks, leave, reflective consultation, and resources like Employee Assistance Programs for all.

### Early Learning Department Recommendations

Create a distinct agency focused on Early Learning, separate from DCYF.