ORGANIZATIONAL LICENSE PILOT PROJECT

Washington State Department of
CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

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CONTENTS

Executive Summary

The 2021-2023 Biennial Budget (ESSB 5092, Section 229(19)) requires the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) to "establish a pilot project to determine the feasibility of a child care license category for multi-site programs operating under one owner or one entity." The 2023-2025 Supplemental Operating Budget (ESSB 5950, Section 229(19)) directs DCYF to complete the pilot to determine if a new licenses category type is feasible for organizations with multiple child care facilities under one owner or entity. The pilot design and the research questions were designed to support organizations as a category of licensed providers with unique needs.

ESSB 5092 responded to child care organizations that were experiencing barriers to licensing new sites during the COVID-19 pandemic, making it difficult to meet the community's need for licensed child care. Their experience highlighted longstanding administrative inefficiencies encountered by organizations with multiple center-based and school-age sites; the pandemic also highlighted our need to address these inefficiencies before the next crisis occurs. As directed by the Legislature, the pilot work occurred between July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2024. The pilot design included a scheduled visit with the organization's primary contact to inspect regulations pertaining to administrative tasks such as policies and staff training records. This scheduled visit was required prior to the licensor completing any unannounced onsite inspections. The pilot also tested a streamlined online application process for organizations. Organizations that applied for new sites during the pilot found the application process saved them time. The pilot ended June 30, 2024. The Legislature funded one additional year to support the transition from project to program implementation.

This report includes a summary of the pilot design, participant recruitment, the launching and running of the pilot, key findings, and recommendations. The design focused on creating streamlined processes for one entity with multiple locations to: gain licensure, ongoing oversight, and address the multitude of varying community needs including ages, programming and diversity in the community, such as diversity of language, culture, racial and ethnic identity, income levels, profit and non-profit programs and government programs. The pilot included center-based and school-age programs only. A mixed method approach was used to guide the decision-making process throughout all phases of the pilot including the conceptual design, interested party input and engagement, practice/implementation, and the analysis/reporting phases of the study. Quantitative and qualitative data was collected throughout the pilot which allowed DCYF to monitor and improve the quality and effectiveness of the design. Quantitative data was collected from DCYF's WA Compass data system, the system of record for child care licensing work, as well as data gathered from the DCYF Office of Innovation, Alignment, and Accountability (OIAA) Early Learning Dashboards.[1] Qualitative data was gathered through participant and licensors surveys. In addition, a participant oversight group and an observer group were formed to gather ongoing feedback from impacted partners.

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[1] https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/practice/oiaa/reports/early-learning-dashboards

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1

Key Findings

- The pilot design focused on creating a more streamlined approach for organizations without adding workload to the licensing staff. Licensor survey responses reported time saved in the majority of inspections.
- Provider participants reported an increase in communication and a positive relationship with licensing as a result of the pilot experience.
- The licensing team reported increased communication with providers and a more streamlined approach; the scheduled organization visit allowed time for licensing and the organization to address technical assistance prior to unannounced site inspections.
- There was a reduction of violations at the organizational level compared to the unannounced site visit.
- Participating organizations overwhelmingly found value in the process of organizational level collaboration with DCYF.
- The pilot identified practice areas that can help to inform consistency across child care licensing, particularly to support collaboration and communication.
- Participants found value in monthly meetings with DCYF and other child care organizations; sharing resources and providing a community of practice.
- The pilot showed increased communication and collaboration across divisions within DCYF as participant concerns were elevated and helped connect providers to resources.

"We've really built relationships and that matters." - Pilot Participant

Recommendations

DCYF recommends that the Organizational License model used in the pilot be explored to inform practice changes statewide to support organizations with licensing and ongoing oversight. There are 90-100 potentially eligible organizations and 950-1000 licenses that can benefit from this approach. DCYF will continue to meet with agencies to maintain and strengthen communication about licensing information when requested.

"I've always felt comfortable and encouraged to share honest feedback at the pilot oversight meetings and have really appreciated the opportunity to do so on behalf of [the organization]. Regardless of the outcome of the pilot, I hope DCYF considers ways for all providers to join these types of discussion groups, in some capacity, to discuss licensing trends and provide ongoing feedback to DCYF leadership." - Pilot Participant

Background

During the COVID-19 pandemic, child care organizations with multiple center-based or school-age sites encountered barriers to adding new sites to meet the community's need for licensed child care. This highlighted long standing administrative inefficiencies that organizations with multiple center-based and

school-age sites experience; the pandemic also highlighted DCYF's need to address these inefficiencies before the next crisis occurs. ESSB 5092, Section 229(19) requires DCYF to establish a pilot project to determine the feasibility of a child care license category for multi-site programs operating under one owner or one entity. The budget proviso that appropriated funds for the pilot was in the 2021-23 (ESSB 5092) and 2023-25 (ESSB 5950) budgets, thus allowing the work to occur from July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2024.

The budget proviso in the 2023-2025 budget ((ESSB 5950, Section 229(19)) also provides DCYF the necessary funding to complete the third year of the pilot and additional time through June 30, 2025, to scale and implement any programmatic recommendations through rule revisions, trainings, and community engagement.

Pilot design took place from September 2021 to May 2022. Community engagement occurred through multiple communication strategies including webinars, DCYF newsletters, provider communications, and presenting and requesting feedback from The Provider Supports Subcommittee of the Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC) and Parent Advisory Group. DCYF collaborated with Tribal partners, internal and external partners, child care businesses, and other contributors, to develop an intentional pilot design that would examine possible practice improvements as well as potential regulatory changes that could be made to create an organizational license category type. DCYF consulted and collaborated with the Administration of Children and Families (ACF) to ensure that any elements of the pilot design would continue to meet our Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) funding requirements.

In addition, and in alignment with The Department of Children, Youth, and Families Strategic Priorities 2021-2026, the pilot team applied racial equity tools to all development and design elements within the pilot and throughout the project. We consulted the DCYF Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ) and the Licensing Division Racial Equity and Social Justice (LD RESJ) Advisory Group to review guiding questions and recommendations for the pilot. We also consulted with the DCYF Office of Tribal Relations (OTR) and attended Indian Policy Early Learning Committee (IPEL) meetings to provide updates and seek feedback on the pilot design.

Organizations that attended community engagement webinars and collaborated in the pilot design identified their desire to have a single organizational license rather than multiple site-specific licenses. Child Care Subsidy billing was a particular issue that organizations hoped could be solved with one license. DCYF explored this request and identified significant negative impacts on provider supports if there were only one organizational license.

- Services such as subsidy, Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), Head Start, and MERIT[2] are all based on individual license ID numbers, the individual site's child enrollment, and onsite staff.
- Provider supports are supported by multiple systems and databases which would require extensive funding and practice changes to update and make one license for an organization even possible.

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[2] MERIT is the Workforce Registry and official system of record for early learning professionals in Washington State

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3

- Programs such as ECEAP and Head Start have their own funding requirements as well which cannot be compromised to make changes from individual licenses to one license for multiple sites.
- DCYF is the lead licensing agency and must meet all requirements of the Child Care Development Fund grant. A single license for an organization is not compatible with the CCDF plan.[3] An individual license is issued for a facility that meets licensing requirements to provide child care in that environment.
- DCYF identified legal impacts of issuing a license to an organization. If a legal action was required, it could result in action on all sites rather than only the one site experiencing elevated concerns.

A license category does not equate to a single license for an organization, nor does a category require a unique set of licensing rules. DCYF recognizes multiple license categories such as family homes, center-based, and school-age child care. Within early learning and education, including licensed and exempt child care, there are additional categories such as ECEAP and Head Start slots. Internal and external partners collaborating on the pilot design did not identify the need for new rules, rather they were motivated to join the pilot to create a more streamlined approach and have more consistent interpretation and application of the licensing rules. Since the pilot could not address the request for one license for multiple sites, the pilot design focused on the research questions and the organizations' priorities for efficiencies in the licensing process (Graph 2: Motivations for Entering the Pilot, page 9).

Problem Statement

Child care providers that operate more than one licensed child care facility report significant barriers to the licensing process.

Purpose Statement

The project aimed to determine the feasibility of a child care license category for multi-site programs operating under one owner or one entity.

Research Questions

1. What are the impacts of an organizational license process on the licensing efficiencies and workload to both organization and licensing staff?
2. What are the effects of an organizational license process on child care availability in areas defined by the stabilization grant[4] (child care deserts, marginalized, low-income communities, communities of color, highest COVID-19 impacted areas)?
3. What are the effects of an organizational license process on compliance consistency for participating facilities?

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[3] https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/2022-2024-Plan-Amendment-4.pdf
[4] Child Care Stabilization Zip Code Factors | Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families

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4

Recruitment and Participation

Initial data indicated that statewide, there were potentially 90-100 organizations with two or more licensed facilities. Based on that data, DCYF identified potentially 950-1000 individual licensed providers (sites or locations that could qualify if specific aspects of the organizational license pilot are implemented). The Legislature required that the pilot include at least one participant that is a government agency, one that is a for-profit organization, and one that is a non-profit organization. The budget proviso also instructed DCYF to include representation from providers in rural, urban, and suburban areas. DCYF focused recruitment efforts and designed selection criteria to meet these requirements and was successful in selecting a participant group with diverse statewide representation.

Graph 1: Participant Representation (page 8) provides the participant representation areas that were identified by the pilot participants.

Organizations were eligible to participate based on the following criteria: 1) Hold or plan to hold center or school age license(s); and 2) have or plan to have more than two facilities under one single owner and met at least one of the following:

- Located in a child care desert,
- Owned or provide services to marginalized populations,
- Located in a low-income community,
- Serves communities of color, or
- Located in an area highly impacted by COVID-19.

Additionally, due to the unknown workload variable for both licensing staff and provider staff, each owner was limited to no more than seven sites enrolled in the pilot. This range allowed providers and licensing staff to practice the process with multiple sites without the number being potentially overwhelming.

Pilot participation in the final year of the pilot continued to be statewide, serving diverse communities. At the end of the pilot there was an increase in child care slots from the first year (Table 1: Child care capacity from year one and year two, page 6).

Year one of the pilot had a total capacity of 5299 slots. 15 sites participated in the pilot as new providers (as indicated by being on an initial license), increased overall pilot slots by 13.7% (715 slots). In year two of the pilot, 24 organizations were participating with 100 sites, ending the pilot with 5897 slots (11.3% increase). At the end of year two there were five applications in process, potentially increasing child care capacity once those applications achieve their first initial licenses.

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5

Table 1: Child care capacity from year one and year two[5]

	Year One Capacity	Year Two Capacity	Percent Change
Organizations	26	24	-7.7%
Licenses	113	100	-11.5%
Capacity	5299	5897	11.3%

Methods

A mixed methods approach was used in the pilot to determine the feasibility of an organizational license category and oversight system. Quantitative and qualitative data was collected continuously throughout the pilot allowing DCYF to monitor and improve the quality and effectiveness of the design throughout the entire process. This approach was used to guide the decision-making process throughout all phases of the pilot including the conceptual design, interested and impacted party engagement and input, practice and implementation, and the analysis and reporting phases of the study.

During the design phase and throughout the pilot we collected qualitative data through meeting notes as well as survey results of pilot participants and licensing staff post licensing visits. These data were used to assess the perspectives and social validity of compliance. The term social validity refers to the need to allow invested parties and community partners to validate critical work to ensure it meets their needs and the results of the work justify the means to get there (Wolf, 1978[6]). Thus, the social validity of an organizational license monitoring system can be measured by inviting invested parties and community partners to participate in the evaluation of the value, usefulness, and effects of the license types and systems on the assessment and oversight surrounding the quality and foundational levels of health and safety for children (Ledford, Hall, Conder & Lane, 2016[7]; Strain, Barton & Dunlap, 2012[8]).

Qualitative Data:

Qualitative data was collected through period surveys at licensing milestones as well as meeting notes. Specifically, surveys were sent out to participants and to pilot licensors at the completion of an initial or initial to full licensing inspection and at the completion of an unannounced monitoring inspection. Using this data, we identified necessary process changes to build consistency within the pilot team. Additionally, during

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[5] Fiscal Year 2022-2023 and Fiscal Year 2023-2024

[6] Wolf, M. M. (1978). Social validity: The case for subjective measurement or how applied behavior analysis is finding its heart. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 11*(2), 203–214. https://doi.org/10.1901/jaba.1978.11-203

[7] Ledford, J. R., Hall, E., Conder, E., & Lane, J. D. (2015). Research for Young Children With Autism Spectrum Disorders: Evidence of Social and Ecological Validity. Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 35(4), 223-233. https://doi.org/10.1177/0271121415585956 (Original work published 2016)

[8] Strain, P. S., Barton, E. E., & Dunlap, G. (2012). Lessons learned about the utility of social validity. *Education & Treatment of Children, 35*(2), 183–200. https://doi.org/10.1353/etc.2012.0007

Original Date: February 2025| Licensing Division | Approved for distribution by Ruben Reeves, Assistant Secretary for Licensing

6

planning and design, DCYF held bi-monthly workgroup meetings with internal staff and external partners as well as monthly pilot participant oversight meetings. An observer group of interested parties was also formed but did not directly participate in the pilot. The observer group met monthly at first and then chose to meet quarterly.

Quantitative Data:

Quantitative data was collected from DCYF's WA Compass data system which is used to document, manage, and track child care license information such as organizational name, parent identification number, location, contact information, individual child care provider name, county, provider ID, and license specific information including capacity, ages allowable, and operating hours. Additional data includes all licensing inspection data (for the organization and the individual facilities) including completed checklists, inspection reports, licensing complaint violations, safety plans and any enforcement actions taken by DCYF during the pilot timeframe.

In order to assess how the organizational license process impacts Washington state communities as defined by the stabilization grant, this pilot utilized data gathered from OIAA which will be reported on DCYF's public website within OIAA Early Learning Dashboards.[9] This includes the Child Care Stabilization Zip Code factors, Child Care and Early Learning Need and Supply Data, and the Early Achievers Data Dashboard.[10][11][12]
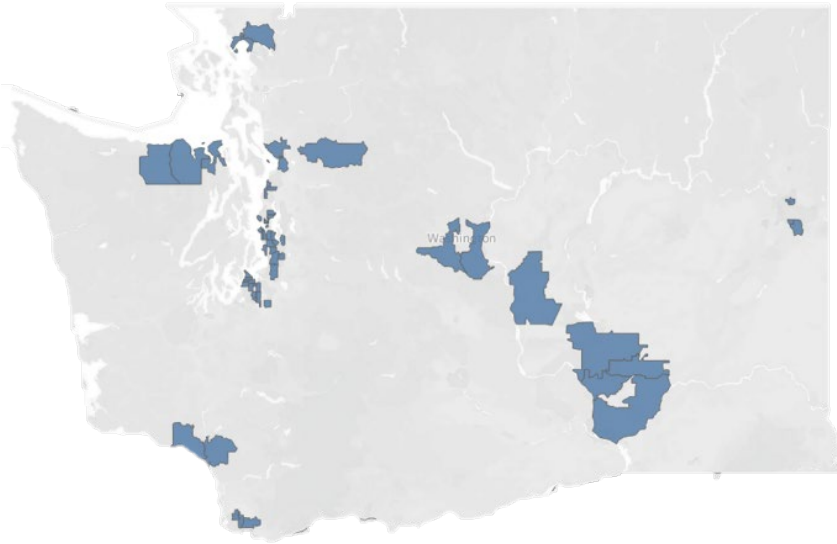
Pilot Results

The pilot launched with a capacity of 216 available slots for individual sites. At launch there were 40 potentially interested organizations, however some providers withdrew interest from the pilot citing reasons as staffing challenges, funding challenges for expansion, and difficulty locating licensable space. As we approached the end of year one, DCYF determined that we did not have the interest or the internal staff to grow the pilot to full capacity. After one year of the pilot, 141 individual sites (existing licenses and planned applications) were participating with 26 organizations representing approximately 3% of the total licensed child care capacity statewide. Between June 2022 and June 2024 of the pilot, one organization did not fully onboard, and another withdrew citing a preference for working with a licensor from their local community.

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[9] https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/practice/oiaa/reports/early-learning-dashboards.

[10] https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/practice/oiaa/reports/early-learning-dashboards/child-care-stabilization

[11] https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/practice/oiaa/reports/early-learning-dashboards/child-care-need-supply-data

[12] https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/practice/oiaa/reports/early-learning-dashboards/early-achievers-data-dashboard

Original Date: February 2025| Licensing Division | Approved for distribution by Ruben Reeves, Assistant Secretary for Licensing

7

Organizational License Pilot Participants by Zip Code

Graph 1: Partcipant Representation

Organizations that participated in the pilot represented all required components outlined in the budget proviso.

Note: Included in the graph are two organizations that withdrew in year one.
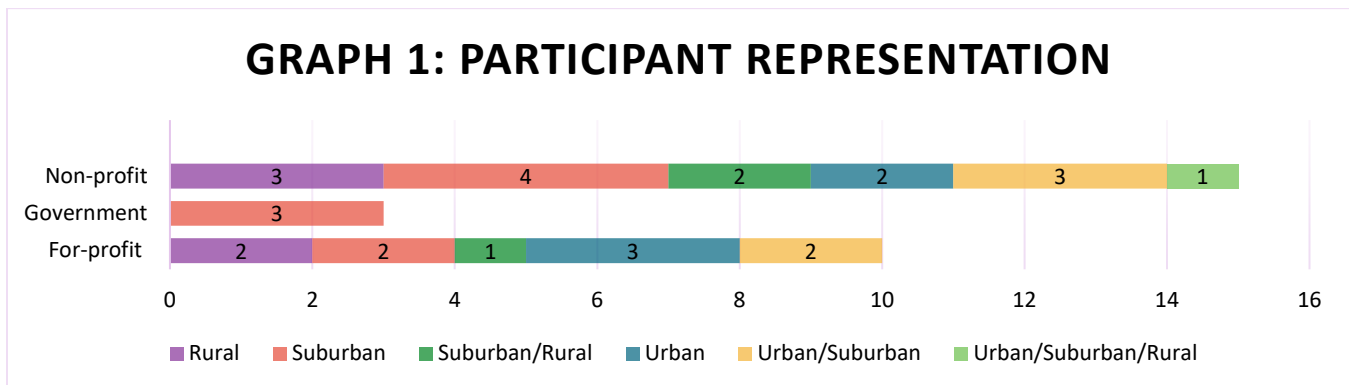

Figure 1 Participant representation by organization type and location type

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8

Graph 2: Motivations for Entering the Pilot

Participant organization contacts were asked to indicate their top three motivations for entering the pilot; overwhelmingly, the ability to provide consistent licensing services was the top priority for most organizations. Because organizations operate sites that often cross office or regional boundaries, working with a large variety of licensors often highlighted the differences in WAC interpretation and licensing processes. Thus, participants found it largely helpful being assigned one licensor per organization rather than per site.
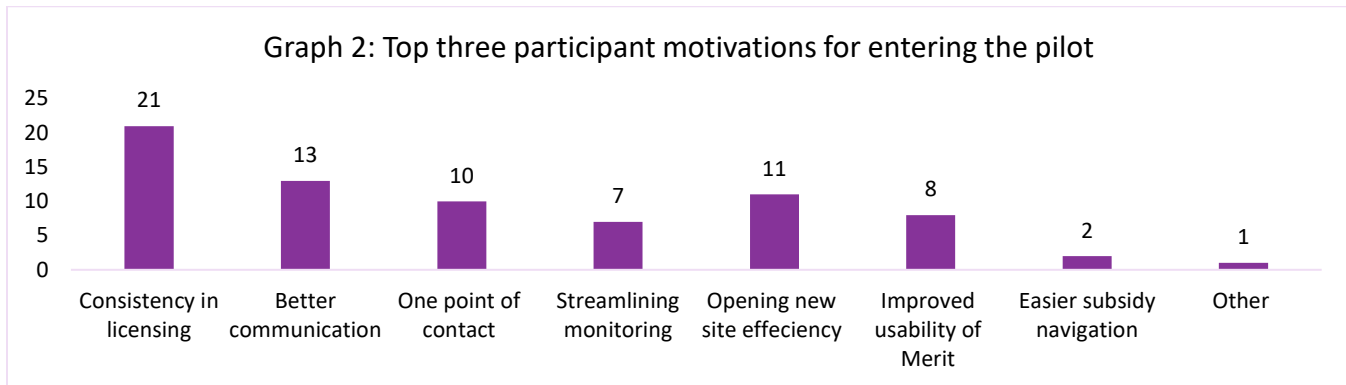
Graph 2: Top three participant motivations for entering the pilot

Motivation	Count
Consistency in licensing	21
Better communication	13
One point of contact	10
Streamlining monitoring	7
Opening new site effeciency	11
Improved usability of Merit	8
Easier subsidy navigation	2
Other	1

Figure 2 Participant motivations for entering the pilot

Other notable priorities included better communication between organizations, sites, and DCYF, efficiencies in opening new facilities, streamlining monitoring, and having one point of contact regardless of location. Two other areas not within the scope of the Licensing Division included a desire for increased usability of both the MERIT system and the subsidy processes. Finally, one organization mentioned a desire to increase community collaborations throughout the pilot.

Research Question 1:

What are the impacts of an organizational license process on the licensing efficiencies and workload to both organization and licensing staff?

Surveys were sent to participants and licensors after every site visit (initial, initial-full, and monitoring visit) during the 2022-23 fiscal year and 2023-24 fiscal year. The licensor and organization feedback collected from the surveys after site visits was overwhelmingly positive. Organizations specifically appreciated that the process was informative and there was rapport and relationship building with DCYF licensors. They also found the process to be efficient and thorough.

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9

Licensor Survey Feedback and Themes Reported in Licensor Survey Feedback
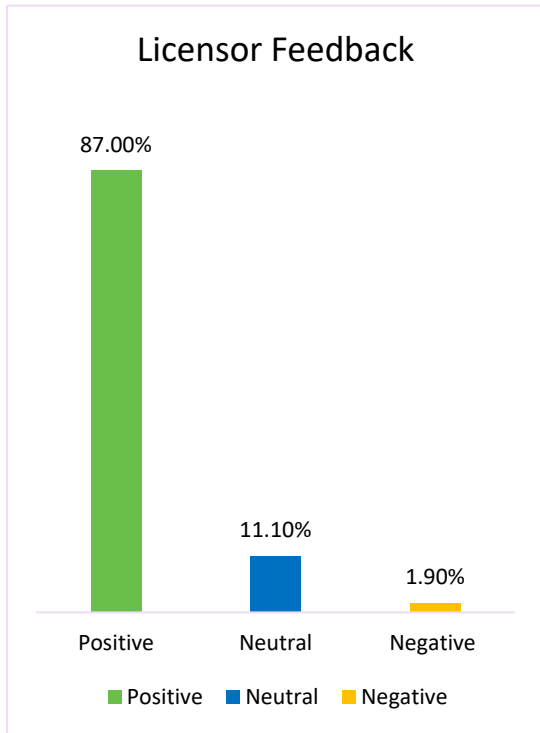
Figure 3 Licensor feedback survey responses

Feedback Theme	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Annual Visit	2	0	0
Compliance	24	2	1
Engagement	16	0	1
Familiarity	7	0	0
Knowledgeable	14	3	0
Management	14	7	1
MERIT	2	0	0
Normal	1	0	0
Not Specified	20	2	0
Organization	3	0	0
Prepared	18	2	0
Pre-work	4	0	0
Rapport	2	1	0
Receptive	8	1	0
Smooth	2	0	0
Streamlined	4	0	0
Support	2	0	0
Time	1	0	0
WAC	1	1	1
Welcoming	27	0	0
Workload	1	0	0
Total	**141**	**18**	**3**

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10

Participant Survey Feedback and Themes Reported in Particpant Survey Feedback

Figure 4 Organization feedback survey responses
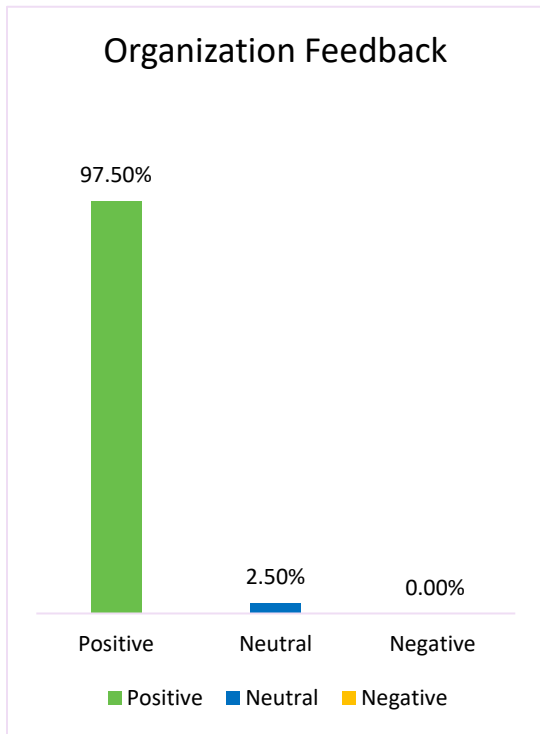
Feedback Theme	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Combined Visit	2	0	0
Communication	6	1	0
Compliance	2	0	0
Consistency	1	1	0
Curiosity	2	0	0
Efficient	9	0	0
Expectations	1	1	0
Feedback	3	0	0
Honesty	2	0	0
Informative	32	0	0
Knowledgeable	5	0	0
New Process	1	0	0
Organized	1	0	0
Prep-work	2	0	0
Rapport	23	0	0
Supportive	8	0	0
Tech Issues	1	0	0
Thorough	9	0	0
Time	1	0	0
Unobtrusive	3	0	0
WAC	2	0	0
Total	116	3	0

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11

Research Question 2:

What are the effects of an organizational license process on child care availability in areas defined by the stabilization grant (child care deserts, marginalized, low-income communities, communities of color, highest COVID-19 impacted areas)?

Pre-participant surveys showed that most providers entering the pilot identified areas they serve have a lack of available child care. Five providers mentioned there is not or they did not know if there was a lack of available child care. Two other providers mentioned that the lack of child care is specific to infant care deficits. All others (16) identified their areas as a child care desert.

The organizations came from communities defined by the stabilization grant. During year two, five new sites were established. There was no significant slot increase directly linked to the pilot; organizations may have opened these sites regardless of the pilot though providers reported that the pilot was a smoother approach to the licensing and monitoring processes.

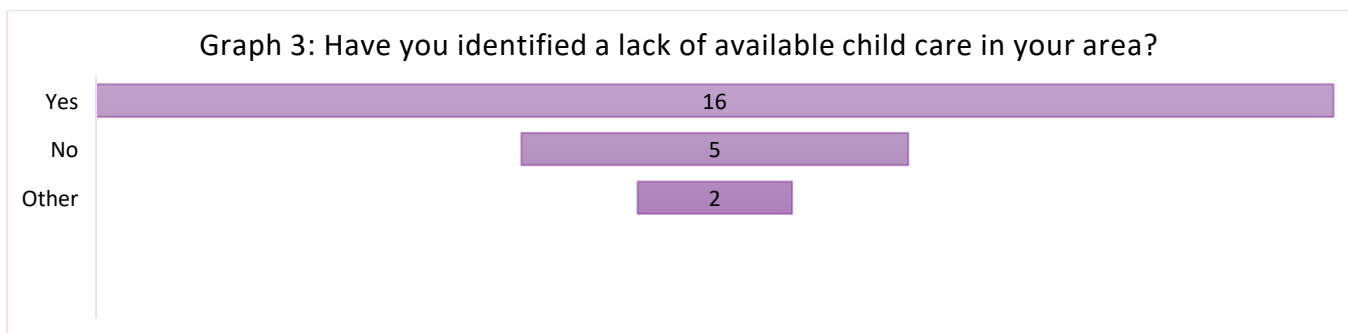## Graph 3: Provider-Identified Lack of Available Child Care

Graph 3: Have you identified a lack of available child care in your area?

Yes	16
No	5
Other	2

Figure 5 Provider-identified lack of child care availability in the areas they serve

Graph 4: Stabilization Grant Criteria Applied to Pilot Participants

All participating organizations land within one or more of the stabilization criteria as indicated in the recruitment section of this report: Individual sites landing in these areas in year one and year two can be seen in Graph 4, below (page 12).

Graph 4: Stabilization Grant Criteria Applied to Pilot Participants

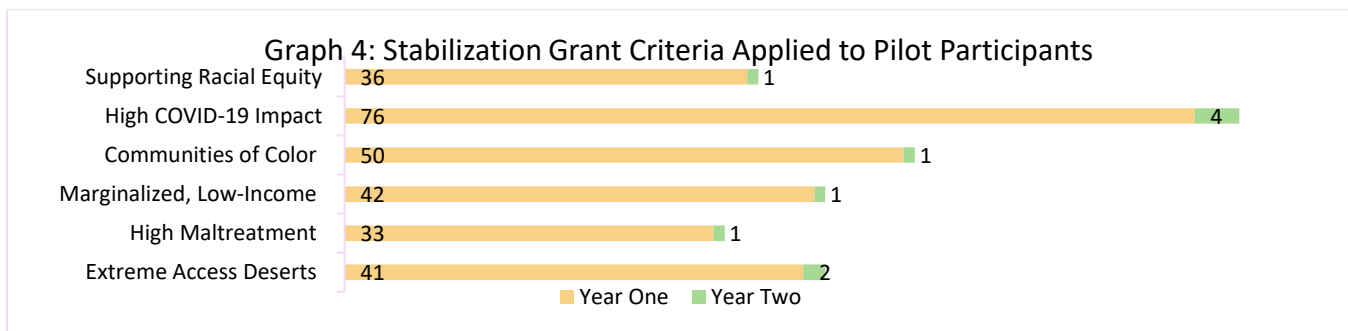|	Year One	Year Two
Supporting Racial Equity	36	1
High COVID-19 Impact	76	4
Communities of Color	50	1
Marginalized, Low-Income	42	1
High Maltreatment	33	1
Extreme Access Deserts	41	2

Figure 6 Pilot participants categorized by what stabilization criteria they meet

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Research Question 3:

What are the effects of an organizational license process on compliance consistency for participating facilities?

When looking at items that were inspected at the organizational level versus those same items at the site inspection (Table 2: Year one, Year two Comparison Summary, page 13), there was a 5.0% reduction in organization violations and an 8.7% increase in violations at the individual sites from year one to year two.[13] The overall reduction between organizations and site violations went from 61.7% in year one to 56.1% in year two. There was a slight decrease in the reduction of compliance from year one to year two, but not a significant decrease. The violations at the organization level were largely related to staff training, such as Child Care Basics, Infant Safe Sleep, and Food Handlers Permit. The number of violations were greatly reduced at the time of a site level visit as can be seen on page 13 in Table 2: Year one, Year two Comparison Summary.

Table 2: Year one, Year two Comparison Summary

Summary	Year One	Year Two	Number Difference	Percent Change
Number of WACS in common at Org and Site Level	20	18	-2	-10.0%
Number of Violations at Org Level for in common WACs at Site Level	180	171	-9	-5.0%
Number of Violations at Site Level for WACs in common at Org Level	69	75	6	8.7%
Number of Reduced Violations from Org to Site Level for in common WACs	111	96	-15	-13.5%
Percentage of Reduction in violations from Org to Site Level for in common WACs	61.7%	56.1%	-5.5%	-9.0%
Percentage of Site Level WACs with Violations found at Org Level	23.8%	20.2%	-3.6%	-15.1%

Approximately 78 items are inspected at the organizational level prior to on-site monitoring inspections of all sites within the organization. If observed out of compliance at the site level, the item will be indicated as non-compliant on the final inspection report. This process not only saves time onsite but also allows organizations to ensure provider sites have corrections made prior to the monitoring visits. Specific WAC violations can be seen in Table 3: WACs Found Out of Compliance at the Organizational level vs Site level (page 14). Negative values in the Reduction Check column indicate that a monitoring visit was completed by the local licensing office prior to joining the pilot. These sites did not receive an organizational level visit, so a comparison was not possible between the two types of visits or to determine if there was improvement.

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[13] Note: Five (5) WACS cited in year one were not cited in year two; however, three (3) new WACS were cited in year two.

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13

Table 3: WACs Found Out of Compliance at the Organizational level vs Site level

WACS both Org and Site	Number Found at Org Year One	Number Found at Org Year Two	Org Difference	Number Found at Site Year One	Number Found at Site Year Two	Site Difference	Reduction Check Year One	Reduction Check Year Two
110-300-0100(5)	4	0	-4	2	0	-2	2	0
110-300-0100(6)(b)(c)(d)	0	4	4	0	1	1	0	3
110-300-0100(7)	14	25	11	1	3	2	13	22
110-300-0105(3)	12	10	-2	1	1	0	11	9
110-300-0106(1)	6	2	-4	2	2	0	4	0
110-300-0106(10)	12	6	-6	3	3	0	9	3
110-300-0106(11)	15	17	2	5	6	1	10	11
110-300-0106(12)	16	19	3	7	7	0	9	12
110-300-0106(3)	29	24	-5	7	13	6	22	11
110-300-0106(8)	13	13	0	6	5	-1	7	8
110-300-0115(3)	0	3	3	0	1	1	0	2
110-301-0100(3)(a)(i)(ii)(A)(B)(iii)	9	4	-5	2	4	2	7	0
110-301-0100(4)(a)(b)(c)(d)(e)	8	11	3	3	2	-1	5	9
110-301-0100(5)(a)(i)(ii)(iii)	11	0	-11	1	0	-1	10	0
110-301-0105(1)	3	2	-1	1	1	0	2	1
110-301-0105(2)	1	0	-1	3	0	-3	-2	0
110-301-0105(3)(a)(b)(c)(i)(ii)(iii)	4	4	0	2	1	-1	2	3
110-301-0106(10)(a)(b)	0	6	6	0	1	1	0	5
110-301-0106(3)(a)(b)(c)	9	4	-5	8	8	0	1	-4
110-301-0106(8)	3	10	7	5	7	2	-2	3
110-301-0106(9)(a)(b)(i)(ii)	4	7	3	5	9	4	-1	-2
110-301-0115(1)(a)(b)(c)(d)	5	0	-5	1	0	-1	4	0
110-301-0115(3)(a)(b)(c)(d)(e)(f)	2	0	-2	4	0	-4	-2	0
Totals	180	171	-9	69	75	6	111	96

▇ (blue)	= WACs cited in year one only
▇ (green)	= WACs cited new in year two

Note: Five (5) WACs cited in year one were not cited in year two; however, three (3) new WACs were cited in year two.

Discussion and Recommendations

The pilot determined that it is not possible for DCYF to issue one license to an organization. Individual licenses for child care facilities are necessary to meet the requirements of multiple provider supports, including child care subsidy, workforce training registry (MERIT), ECEAP, Head Start, and to meet the CCDF federal funding requirements for licensing.

The organizational level visit is completed once per fiscal year and is an opportunity to identify any changes to those organizational related policies and the handbook, and to collect any updated documents. Participants report that this scheduled visit has identified issues the organization can address across multiple sites, supporting their efforts to maintain compliance between site visits. Licensor survey results show that the pilot process feels more streamlined because it saves the licensor time during the onsite visits. Licensors and pilot participants have reported that the scheduled visit provides an opportunity for relationship building and strengthening communication.

DCYF leadership questioned the equity of this level of monitoring for only some providers across the state. Many agencies identified during the pilot have different financial access than providers in marginalized areas of the state. DCYF leadership thought that if we had the resources to offer this level of monitoring, then it should be offered to all providers, specifically those who are in marginalized communities and serve children and families in those communities.

The key findings of the Organizational License Pilot are informing license practice changes to support child care organizations. DCYF is exploring system updates for online applications to meet the specific needs of organizations with multiple sites.

Compliance

In year one it was unknown why 24% of the violations found at an organizational level were not corrected by the site visit. This was an area the pilot continued to explore in year two of the pilot through process evaluation and continuous participant interviews and surveys. One-on-one interviews conducted with the pilot participants indicate that updating staff information in MERIT is challenging for organizations, which can result in violations to licensing training requirements for staff. There are some items that need to be updated by the individual staff person and although they may receive reminders from the organization, some staff do not follow through in a timely manner to correct the violations related to staff training. Participants reported that they would prefer to have more administrative control in MERIT at the organization level to remove this workload from their onsite directors. The Professional Development Team within DCYF, which supports MERIT, attended multiple pilot participant oversight meetings to hear concerns and is exploring possible improvements to the system based on pilot participant feedback. Organizations expressed appreciation for the communication and that they felt their concerns were being heard. This is one of several examples where the pilot intentionally cultivated collaboration and connection with providers to inform resources and licensing practices.

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15

Communication

Overall, the small licensing team reported increased communication with providers and time saved at the onsite inspections. Licensor survey data in year two found that in several inspections the time was not shortened onsite. The licensors reported the visit was no different from current practice, indicating that this process did not add additional workload either. These same inspections also had several items from the organization visit that were out of compliance at the site level, due to staffing changes onsite. The inspections were also completed by licensors who joined the pilot in December 2023, after the scheduled organizational level visit had already been completed. While they were able to access notes and inspection report information from the organization visit, they did not have the opportunity to practice the organizational level visit themselves. This could have had an impact on the results of the site visits.

Collaboration and Clarity

During the pilot, participating organizations and provider sites overwhelmingly found value in the process of organizational level collaboration with DCYF. When there was an unexpected staffing change in the pilot, DCYF facilitated virtual meetings to introduce the additional staff to the organizations' primary contacts and onsite staff, to support initial relationship building, and address any concerns and answer any immediate questions. Through pilot participant oversight meetings, DCYF facilitated connections for providers to internal and external resources. Participants have been invited to provide feedback to inform DCYF work that is outside of the pilot, including but not limited to various FSKA funded projects, Trauma Informed Care training, Early Care And Education Access and Living Wage Proviso, Help Me Grow Washington, Early Learning Facility (ELF) grants, exploring Employer Supported Care, and understanding the greater system of Technical Assistance that providers can access. While many of these projects and barriers identified by the participants are outside the scope of this pilot, the information gathered has been shared across divisions and agencies.

"All our center directors that have participated with this pilot have shared positive feedback about their interactions [with licensor] and how supportive and seamless the licensing visits have gone. Having a primary contact person available to support directors throughout the processes has significantly alleviated much of the stress and anxiety associated with monitoring and ongoing communication." - Pilot Participant

Original Date: February 2025| Licensing Division | Approved for distribution by Ruben Reeves, Assistant Secretary for Licensing

16

Conclusion

The pilot process requires a scheduled visit with the organization's primary contact to inspect regulations pertaining to administrative tasks such as the organization's policies and staff training records.

Pilot survey data shows overall satisfaction with the pilot process for licensors and organizations. Reasons given by the organizations include licensors taking time to answer questions and technical assistance is based on the WAC. Reasons given by licensors for a more streamlined process onsite include that onsite staff was prepared and knowledgeable about the pilot process. For organizations who submitted applications during the pilot, the licensing staff and pilot participants reported that the pilot's application process was more streamlined and saved time when licensing a new facility.

Additionally, due to the nature of pilot procedures and the need to control variables through the research process, the pilot has been able to identify some areas of licensor practice that can help to inform consistency across child care licensing. These lessons have been shared with child care licensing leadership.

Recommendations

DCYF recommends that the Organizational License process in the pilot be explored to inform practice changes statewide to support organizations with licensing and ongoing oversight. There are 90-100 potentially eligible organizations and 950-1000 licenses that can benefit from this approach. While this pilot demonstrated that we do not need a new licensing category or needed law changes to allow multi-site program licensing, DCYF recommends adopting a practice change within its WA Compass and Provider Portal data systems, allowing a parent/child account, to streamline shared policies across agencies.

Original Date: February 2025| Licensing Division | Approved for distribution by Ruben Reeves, Assistant Secretary for Licensing

17