

JULY 2021

WALLA WALLA VALLEY
EARLY LEARNING COALITION

EMPLOYER GUIDE

We live in a child care desert, and here is what employers like YOU can do to help!

THE SITUATION

The 2020 Washington Department of Commerce “Washington Child Care Industry Assessment” identifies Walla Walla and Columbia counties as “child care deserts,” meaning we do not have enough licensed child care slots to meet demand.

The “Washington Child Care Industry Assessment” estimates 96% of families in Columbia County and 18% of Walla Walla County families do not have the child care they need.

WHY TAKE ACTION?

When employees cannot access the child care they need, employers’ costs increase, productivity goes down, and it is harder to hire and maintain a workforce.

Child care impacts the wellbeing of children, families, employers, and our community as a whole.

Additional child care slots needed to no longer be a child care desert:

70 slots in Columbia County

180 slots in Walla Walla County



In the Walla Walla Valley...

Data from the "Creating an Accessible Valley Wide Child Care System" feasibility study and the "Walla Walla Cares for Kids" data project

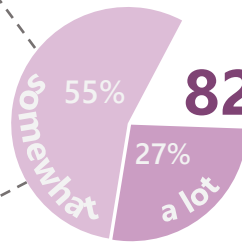
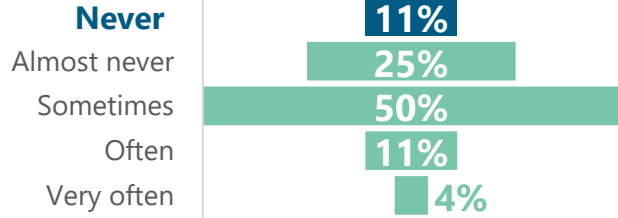
47% of parents have had to **limit their work hours** (n=359),

47% have had to **take time off work** (n=361), and

25% have had to **quit a job** (n=358) because of child care difficulties.



Only **11%** of family survey respondents said they **never miss work** because of child care challenges (n=360).



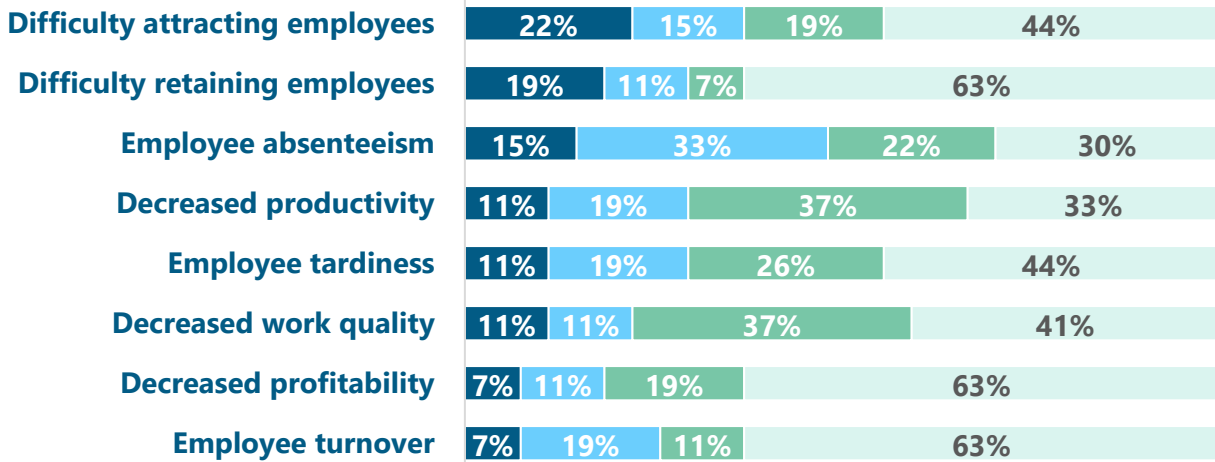
82% of parents say that child care responsibilities have limited their job performance or career goals (n=359).



Employers experience

many problems due to employees having trouble setting up child care that meets their needs (n=27).

■ Significant problem ■ Moderate problem ■ Slight problem ■ Not a problem



...child care is too expensive for most families...

The average family survey respondent pays

\$1,011 a month

for child care.



Mean: \$1,011
Median: \$800
Mode: \$2,000



The average percent of two-parent family income required for full-time child care in the Walla Walla Valley is

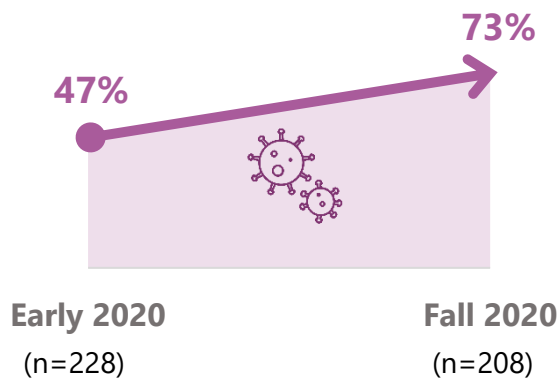
20.1% for infants

17.6% for toddlers, and

15.1% for preschoolers.

...and the COVID-19 pandemic has made things worse.

The proportion of children whose families are unable to access affordable child care increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Employer survey respondents said...



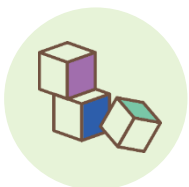
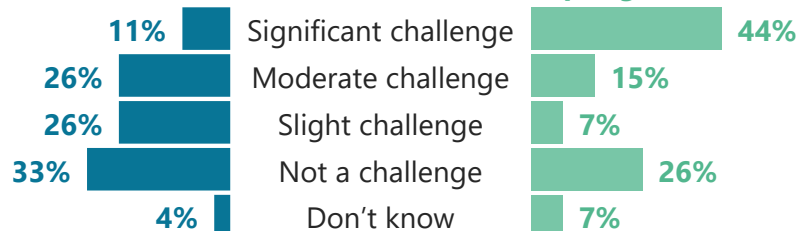
“Finding infant care has been our biggest issue for our employees. Also, with school closures and zero tolerance on sickness at care centers, our employees are stuck choosing between work and their kids.”

“The majority of employees are production operators and have small families. Being in a smaller remote location they are challenged with 12-hour shifts and not enough child care.”

Finding child care arrangements that met their needs became a **significant challenge** to more employees (n=27).

Before COVID-19

Spring 2021





THE ROLE OF EMPLOYERS

Employers can play an important role in building and supporting accessible and affordable child care in the Walla Walla Valley.

Three models of engagement

- 1** In the **single employer** model, an employer works independently to meet its own needs. This can take many forms, from making child care available onsite to offering child care vouchers or flexible spending accounts.
- 2** In **employer consortiums**, multiple employers collaborate to share costs and meet common needs. For example, employers work together to purchase space in existing child care programs, fund ill-child care, secure child care that accommodates nonstandard schedules, among other possibilities. An employer consortium can take many forms depending on the interests and resources of those participating.
- 3** In **community coalitions**, like the Walla Walla Valley Early Learning Coalition, employers collaborate with local, state, federal, nonprofit, and business partners to meet common needs and advance the overall child care system over the long term.

These models are not exclusive; they represent different arenas of engagement important for on-the-ground improvements.

EMPLOYER RECOMMENDATIONS

Rec. 1 Connect your employees to resources

- Provide workshops where employees can learn about available child care and parenting resources.
- Contract with a local agency that can assist your employees in locating child care.
- Connect employees to a website that helps parents locate and select child care.
- Connect employees to a navigator who helps parents through the process of locating and selecting child care.
- Provide information about child care and services in Spanish.

Child Care Aware of Washington

provides an online database containing information about child care providers and current child care occupancies. Visit www.childcareawarewa.org for more information.

Need more information?

These child care super stars can help!

Walla Walla Valley Early Learning Coalition

500 Tausick Way
Walla Walla, WA 99362
earlylearningwallawalla.org

Eiledon McClellan, Program Manager
Phone: (509) 526-1777

Walla Walla Center for Children and Families

1150 W. Chestnut
Walla Walla, WA 99362
www.wwccf.org/contact/
Phone: 509-527-3066

Children's Home Society of Washington

1612 Penny Lane
Walla Walla, WA 99362
childrenshomesociety.org/wallawalla
Phone: 509-529-2130

Ruth Triebwasser, Family Navigator
Cell: 509-607-6273
ruth.triebwasser@chs-wa.org

Linda Solis, Family Navigator
(se habla Español)
Cell: 509-767-7008
[Linda Solis linda.solis@chs-wa.org](mailto:linda.solis@chs-wa.org)

Rec. 2 Provide flexibility and support

- Allow alternative work schedules and arrangements, as needed and possible.
- Develop and support parental leave policies.

"Employees view providing adequate child care benefits as increasingly important in rating us highly as a place to work."
-Employer survey participant

Rec. 3 Provide economic supports

- Provide subsidies, reimbursements, or vouchers to employees to help cover a portion of child care costs.
- Offer dependent care flexible spending accounts.
- Provide employees with information about child care-related tax credits, tax deductions, and tax-advantaged savings accounts.

You can help set up and inform your employees about these benefits.

Dependent Care

Assistance Program

(aka **Dependent Care Flexible Spending Accounts**)

Allows employees to set aside up to \$5,000/year pre-tax from paychecks for licensed child care costs. This program is set up through employers.

Child Tax Credit

Eligible families will receive up to \$300 per month for each qualifying child age 5 and younger. The monthly payout is up to \$250 per month for each qualifying child ages 6 to 17.

Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit

Tax credit to be claimed by parents who pay a licensed provider to care for a child under 13. Credit is worth 20%-35% of child care costs.

Expansion of Working Connections Child Care Subsidy through Fair Start for Kids Act

Subsidy co-pays for families are waived through September and beginning July 1st families at 200% of FPL or lower will be eligible for subsidy. Beginning October 1 subsidy eligibility will increase to 60% of State Median Income and monthly co-pays will be capped at \$115 for families.

Washington Paid Family and Medical Leave

Employees can take up to 12 weeks from work if they have a qualifying medical condition, need to care for a family member with a serious health condition, are bonding with a new baby or child in their family, or have a family member who is about to be deployed overseas with the military. Family leave can be used for caring for spouses or domestic partners, children (biological, adopted, foster, or stepchild), parents (or spouse's parents), siblings, grandchildren, grandparents, and children-in-law.

Employers can take many actions to help, including...

- > Providing workshops
- > Organizing parent group meetings
- > Offering child care reimbursement
- > Contracting with a child care provider for backup child care
- > Negotiating reduced rates in a child care program in exchange for a contribution
- > Reserving spaces in a child care program
- > Contracting with local resource and referral agencies
- > Offering dependent care flexible spending accounts
- > Providing child care vouchers
- > Operating a child care program onsite

Rec. 4 Provide child care onsite or nearby

- Operate a child care program for employees' children.
- As a single employer or with an employer consortium, have a 3rd party operate a child care center onsite or nearby.
- Reserve slots in a local child care program to ensure spaces are available for employees.

Rec. 5 Support employee transportation needs

- Offer gas cards or public transportation vouchers.
- Provide a car that employees can use during work hours if they have a child care emergency.
- Set up a business-specific transportation service as a single employer or with an employer consortium.

Credit for employer-provided child care facilities and services

Who qualifies for the credit?

If you are an employer and you provide child care facilities for your employees either onsite or through a contract or referral program with an outside child care provider, then you can qualify for this child care tax credit.

How much is the credit?

The credit is for 25% of the amount paid for child care expenditures (for such things as constructing and maintaining the property) and 10% for the amount paid to provide child care resources or referral services to employees. The total limit for this credit is \$150,000 per year.

For more information, visit:
<https://www.irs.gov/forms-pubs/about-form-8882>

Rec. 6 Subsidize and incentivize child care, including sick, drop-in, backup, and overnight care

- Contract with a child care provider so employees have backup care when their usual provider is unavailable.
- Contract with a child care provider so employees have child care when their children are sick.

Rec. 7 Participate in community child care coalitions

- Join the Walla Walla Valley Early Learning Coalition (WWVELC).
- Participate in the WWVELC working group focused on expanding employer engagement.
- Model best practices for other employers.
- Advocate for policy changes and additional resources.



MOVING FORWARD

The Walla Walla Valley needs immediate action to make child care more accessible and affordable for parents, providers, and employers.

Whether your business is large or small, you want to work alone or join a consortium or coalition, you can make an impact on your employees' families to benefit them, your organization, and the entire Walla Walla Valley community!



For more information and details regarding

- The current Walla Walla Valley child care situation,
- Recommendations for action, and
- Interests of parents, providers, and employers,

check out the full “Creating an Accessible, Valley-Wide Child Care System” feasibility study report.

Additional information and resources, including the “Walla Walla Cares For Kids Data Project,” can be found on the Walla Walla Valley Early Learning Coalition website at www.earlylearningwallawalla.org.

This guide was developed by Arrowleaf Consulting for the Walla Walla Valley Early Learning Coalition as part of the "Creating an Accessible, Valley-Wide Child Care System" feasibility study conducted in Spring 2021.

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