



Executive Summary

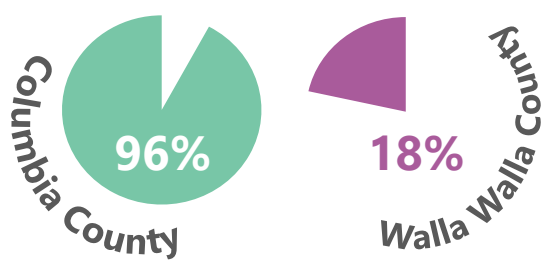
Creating an Accessible, Valley-Wide Child Care System
Feasibility Study

WE LIVE IN A CHILD CARE DESERT

We do not have enough licensed child care slots to meet demand.



Percent of families that do not have the child care they need...



In Columbia County, three in-home providers closed in 2020-2021, pushing the county into a

CHILD CARE CRISIS



"We desperately need daycare in [Columbia] County." –Family survey respondent

THE SITUATION

CHILD CARE IS EXPENSIVE...

Depending on operation size, salaries, and licensing level, the annual cost for centers to provide child care is...

\$13,000-\$19,300/infant

\$8,800-\$12,300/toddler

\$7,000-\$9,300/preschooler

\$2,800-\$3,900/school-age child



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

15.1% for preschoolers

*"You can't make it on one income, but you can't afford the child care to work."
- Parent focus group participant*

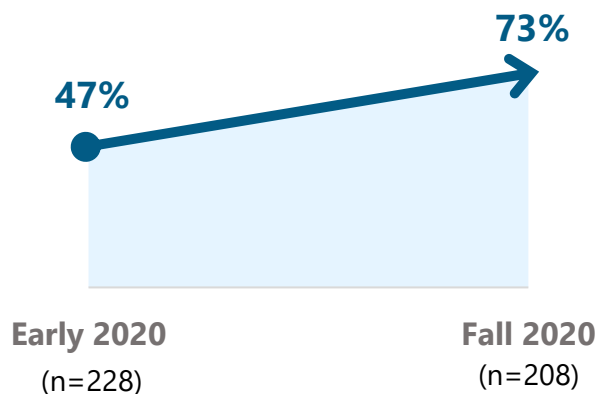
...AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS MADE THINGS WORSE.

"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."

- Employer survey respondent



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

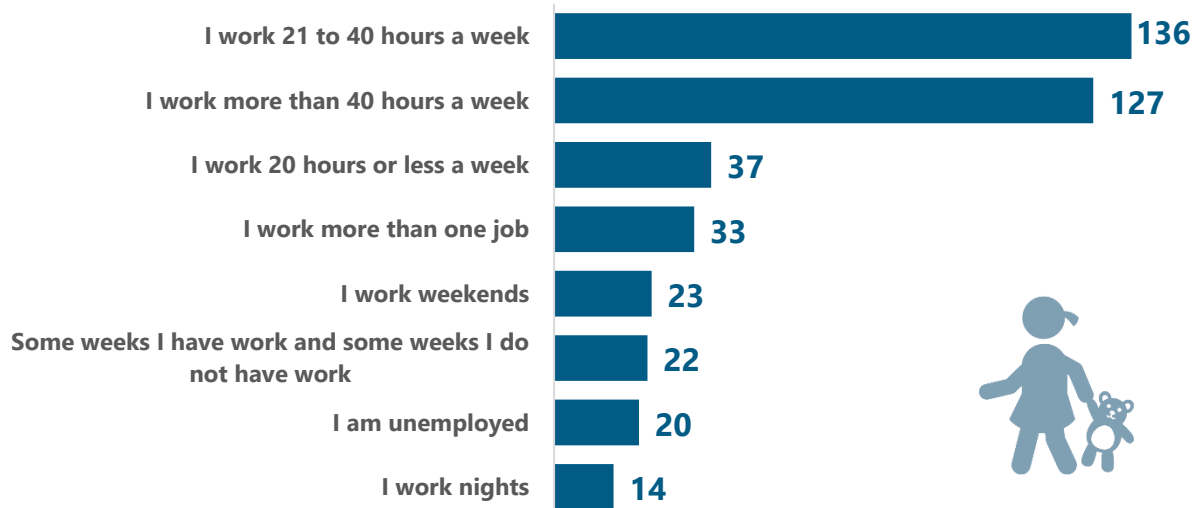


FAMILY PERSPECTIVES

77% of family survey respondents said that finding affordable child care is a significant or moderate challenge for them (n=365).

69% said that finding child care at the times needed is a significant or moderate challenge for them (n=354).

Many family survey respondents work more than 40 hours a week and some work weekends and nights (n=328)



82% of family survey respondents said that child care responsibilities limit their job performance or career goals.

Because of child care difficulties

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

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

25% have had to **quit a job** (n=358).

EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVES

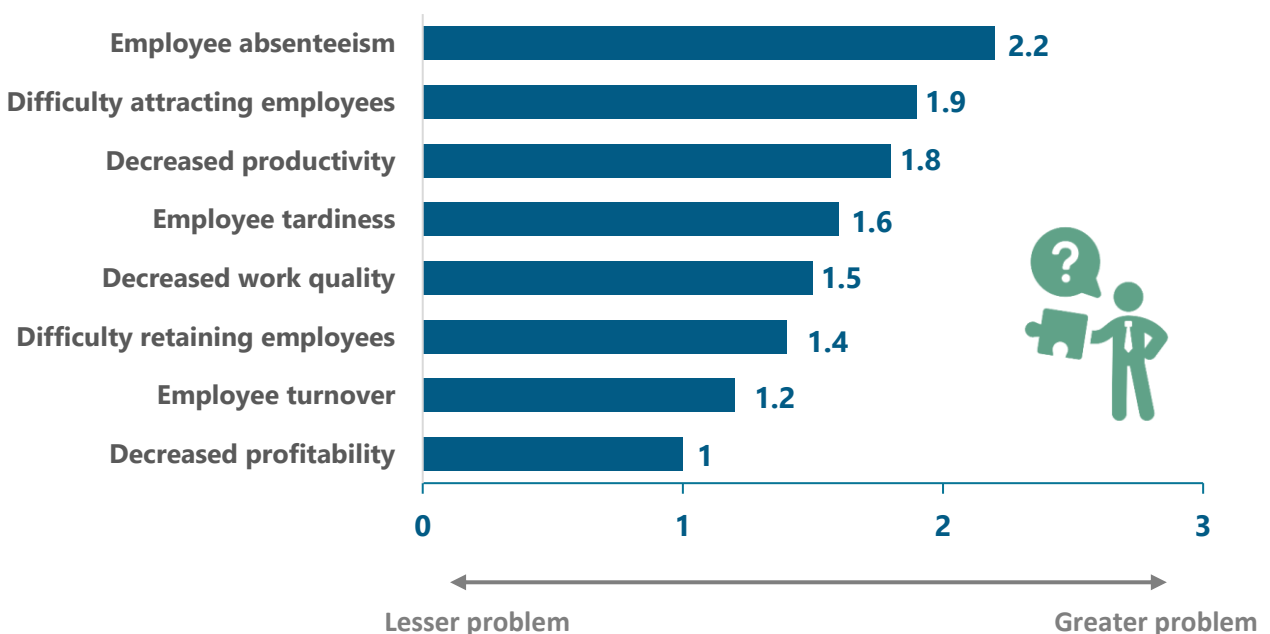
15 out of 25 employer survey respondents are interested in offering a Dependent Care Flexible Spending Account, compared to 5 that already do.

13 out of 25 employer survey respondents are very or moderately interested in working with a coalition to pool resources and carry out shared child care projects.

“Employees view providing adequate child care benefits as increasingly important in rating us highly as a place to work.”

– Employer survey respondent

When employees cannot access the child care they need, costs increase, productivity goes down, and it is harder to hire and maintain a workforce. Average amount issues are a problem (0-not a problem to 3-significant problem) for employers (n=27).



PROVIDER PERSPECTIVES

6 providers typically have more than five children on their waiting lists (n=14).

9 say it typically takes more than three months to have an opening to enroll a new child (n=14).

10 have fewer than six openings a year (n=14).



10 identified these issues as a significant or moderate challenge (n=13):

- Licensing and regulation fees and costs
- Reduced income related to COVID-19
- Inadequate paid sick leave
- Finding and retaining quality staff

Child care providers are very or somewhat interested in

8/12

collaborating with other providers to form a local child care substitute service,

7/12

collaborating with other providers to form a health insurance cooperative, and

7/12

negotiating a reduced rate for the employees of a business in exchange for the business making a contribution to their child care program.

COST MODELS

Findings from our cost model analysis include:

- ◆ Caring for older children can help offset the cost of caring for younger children;
- ◆ The more classrooms, the more cost effective; and
- ◆ Paying living wages dramatically increases costs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Priority 1: Making the child care system accessible for all families, especially immigrant and undocumented families

- 1 | Develop a new center in Dayton
- 2 | Expand capacity at existing private licensed centers in Walla Walla County
 - 2.1 | Develop consistent funding for small upgrades or other projects
 - 2.2 | Hire someone to help providers overcome expansion constraints
- 3 | Increase licensed provider capacity across both counties over the next 6 years
 - 3.1 | Expand and develop new centers
 - 3.2 | Expand ECEAP and Head Start
 - 3.3 | Recruit new in-home licensed providers in all areas of the Walla Walla Valley
 - 3.4 | Increase support for Spanish-speaking providers
 - 3.5 | Develop a pathway to licensing for undocumented child care providers
 - 3.6 | Develop a purchasing cooperative to reduce costs
 - 3.7 | Develop a facility cooperative to reduce costs and expand services
- 4 | Increase employer engagement
 - 4.1 | Connect employees to child care resources
 - 4.2 | Provide flexibility and support for employees with children
 - 4.3 | Provide economic support
 - 4.4 | Provide child care onsite or nearby
 - 4.5 | Support employee transportation needs
 - 4.6 | Subsidize and incentivize care, including sick, drop-in, backup, and overnight care
 - 4.7 | Participate in child care coalitions

- 5 | Build navigation and in-person support across the system
 - 5.1 Coordinate online resources to help everyone find what they need
 - 5.2 Develop a single online platform to connect families to child care
 - 5.3 Improve the referral system
 - 5.4 Create and support child care navigator positions
 - 5.5 Provide training, support, or resources to build organizational capacity
- 6 | Improve communications and engagement with Spanish-speaking families
 - 6.1 Use multiple communication modes and outlets
 - 6.2 Prioritize hiring bilingual staff
 - 6.3 Expand the Garrison Night School program
- 7 | Develop WWVELC as an independent nonprofit organization
 - 7.1 Hire a development director
 - 7.2 Hire navigators and support staff
 - 7.3 Expand WWVELC communication and coordination roles
- 8 | Increase resources
 - 8.1 Increase federal and state funding
 - 8.2 Increase funding and support from private foundations
 - 8.3 Develop a dedicated child care fund for the Walla Walla Valley
 - 8.4 Increase use of impact investing and micro lending
 - 8.5 Build capacity at existing groups to advance their mission related to child care
- 9 | Create enabling local policies

Priority 2: Increasing child care affordability for middle-income families

- 10 | Bridge the 6-year subsidy eligibility gap for middle-income families
 - 10.1 Increase subsidies for middle-income families
 - 10.2 Increase use of tax credits and dependent care flexible spending accounts
 - 10.3 Encourage and support parent cooperatives

Priority 3: Increasing licensed child care availability in the extremely rural areas of our region

- 11 | Implement multi-sectoral capacity building targeting rural areas
 - 11.1 Incentivize and support child care in rural areas
 - 11.2 Target rural areas with information specific to their needs
 - 11.3 Hire a navigator to work with rural families, employers, and providers
 - 11.4 Engage employers who have employees who live and work in rural areas
 - 11.5 Build capacity at existing organizations working in rural areas
 - 11.6 Access funding to support child care efforts in rural areas

Priority 4: Increasing new and existing child care providers' capacity to serve infants and toddlers

- 12 | Implement multi-sectoral capacity building for infant and toddler care
 - 12.1 Incentivize in-home providers to serve infants and toddlers
 - 12.2 Employers provide a subsidy to employees with infants and toddlers
 - 12.3 Offer free space to existing providers if they serve more infants and toddlers
 - 12.4 Expand Early ECEAP and Early Head Start
 - 12.5 Build navigation and referral capacity for infant and toddler care
 - 12.6 Develop employer consortiums and expand community coalitions
 - 12.7 Employers provide access to dependent care flexible spending accounts and other programs