



## OCR Racial Equity Toolkit Assessment Worksheet

**Title of policy, initiative, program, budget issue:** Child Care Workforce Payments

**Description:** Annual payments to be issued to staff at licensed child care providers to support Seattle child care workers.

**Department:** Department of Education and Early Learning (DEEL)

**Contact:** Raka Bhattacharya

**Indicate whether the item is:**

Policy    Initiative    Program    Budget Issue

### Step 1. Set Outcomes.

**1a. What does your department define as the most important racially equitable community outcomes related to the issue?**

- # Sites Participating
- # Workers Participating
- % of Participants staying in workforce from year to year

**1b. Which racial equity opportunity area(s) will the issue primarily impact?**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Education             | <input type="checkbox"/> Criminal Justice |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Community Development | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Jobs  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Health                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Housing          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Environment                      |   |

**Are there impacts on impacts on:**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Contracting Equity | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Immigrant/Refugee Access to Services |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Workforce Equity   | <input type="checkbox"/> Inclusive Outreach and Public Engagement        |

Please describe:

- The child care workforce is mainly women of color and immigrants.
- Family Child Care (FCCs) providers operate small businesses on razor-thin profit margins with limited administrative capacity.
- Application system barriers (e.g., address verification confusion, language access gaps) disproportionately impact immigrant providers and providers near Seattle city boundaries (e.g., White Center, Burien, Lynnwood, etc.).



## Step 2. Involve Stakeholders & Analyze Data.

**2a. Are there impacts on geographic areas?**     Yes                       No

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> All Seattle Neighborhoods	<input type="checkbox"/> Lake Union	<input type="checkbox"/> East District
<input type="checkbox"/> Ballard	<input type="checkbox"/> Southwest	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> King County (outside Seattle)
<input type="checkbox"/> North	<input type="checkbox"/> Southeast	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Outside King County
<input type="checkbox"/> NE	<input type="checkbox"/> Delridge	Please describe: <i>Snohomish County child care workers.</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Central	<input type="checkbox"/> Greater Duwamish	

### 2b. What are the racial demographics of those living in the area or impacted by the issue?

Seattle’s child population and early learning workforce reflect a pronounced racial and economic divide with important implications for equity and program design. From Seattle Public Schools data<sup>1</sup> we know that 54% of enrolled students are children of color, and the child care workforce is disproportionately made up of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), as well as immigrants. This is also the case at the Washington state level, where approximately half of child care providers are people of color.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, child care jobs are among the lowest paid professions, with lead teachers earning roughly \$17–\$20 per hour on average in King County, despite the high cost of living.<sup>3</sup> These low wages contribute to high turnover—estimated at around 43% in Washington and significantly higher than other occupations nationally—which disrupts continuity of care. Research from the Harvard Center on the Developing Child shows that stable, responsive relationships with caregivers are essential for healthy brain development and the formation of cognitive and social-emotional skills.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, workforce instability from low wages and staff turnover not only affects providers but also has direct consequences for child outcomes and long-term educational equity.

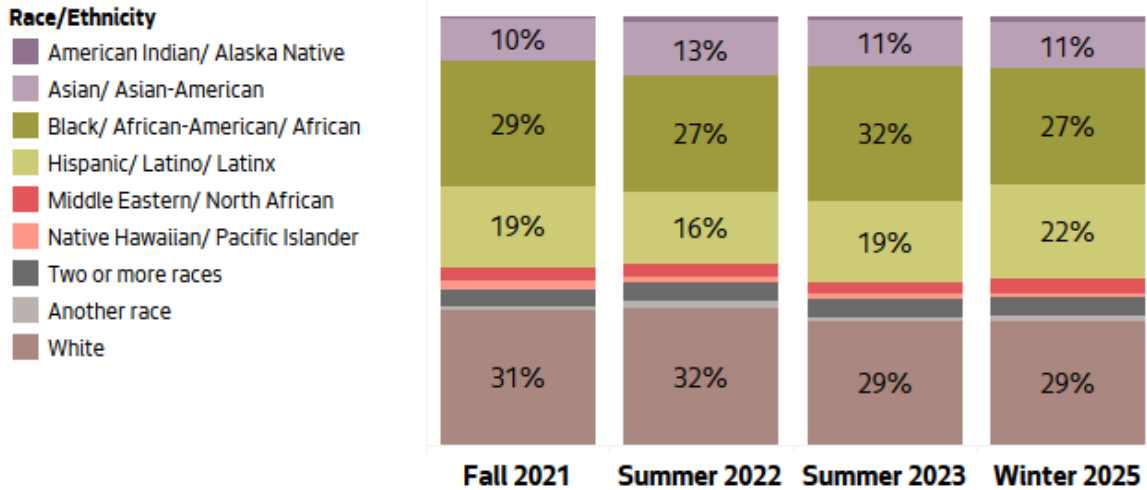
Researchers from the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment found that even after controlling for educational attainment, African American educators working with infants and toddlers earn on average \$0.77 less per hour than their white counterparts. For those working with preschool age children the gap is \$1.73 per hour.<sup>5</sup> Beginning in 2021, the City of Seattle began offering Child Care

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<sup>1</sup> Seattle Public Schools, *2023–24 SPS Race and Ethnicity*, retrieved from <https://www.seattleschools.org/about/>  
<sup>2</sup> J. Capito and S. Workman, *Understanding the True Cost of Child Care in the City of Seattle and King County* (Prenatal to Five Fiscal Strategies, 2023), [https://www.seattle.gov/documents/Departments/DEEL/Results/Reports%20and%20Data/Child%20Care%20Reports/KC\\_Seattle\\_CostofCareBrief\\_FINALdesign\\_July%202023.pdf](https://www.seattle.gov/documents/Departments/DEEL/Results/Reports%20and%20Data/Child%20Care%20Reports/KC_Seattle_CostofCareBrief_FINALdesign_July%202023.pdf)  
<sup>3</sup> Capito and Workman, *True Cost of Child Care*.  
<sup>4</sup> Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, *From Best Practices to Breakthrough Impacts: A Science-Based Approach to Building a More Promising Future for Young Children and Families* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2016), <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/from-best-practices-to-breakthrough-impacts/>  
<sup>5</sup> L. J. E. Austin, B. Edwards, and M. Whitebook, *Racial Wage Gaps in Early Education Employment* (Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley, 2019), <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/publications/brief/racial-wage-gaps-in-early-education-employment/>

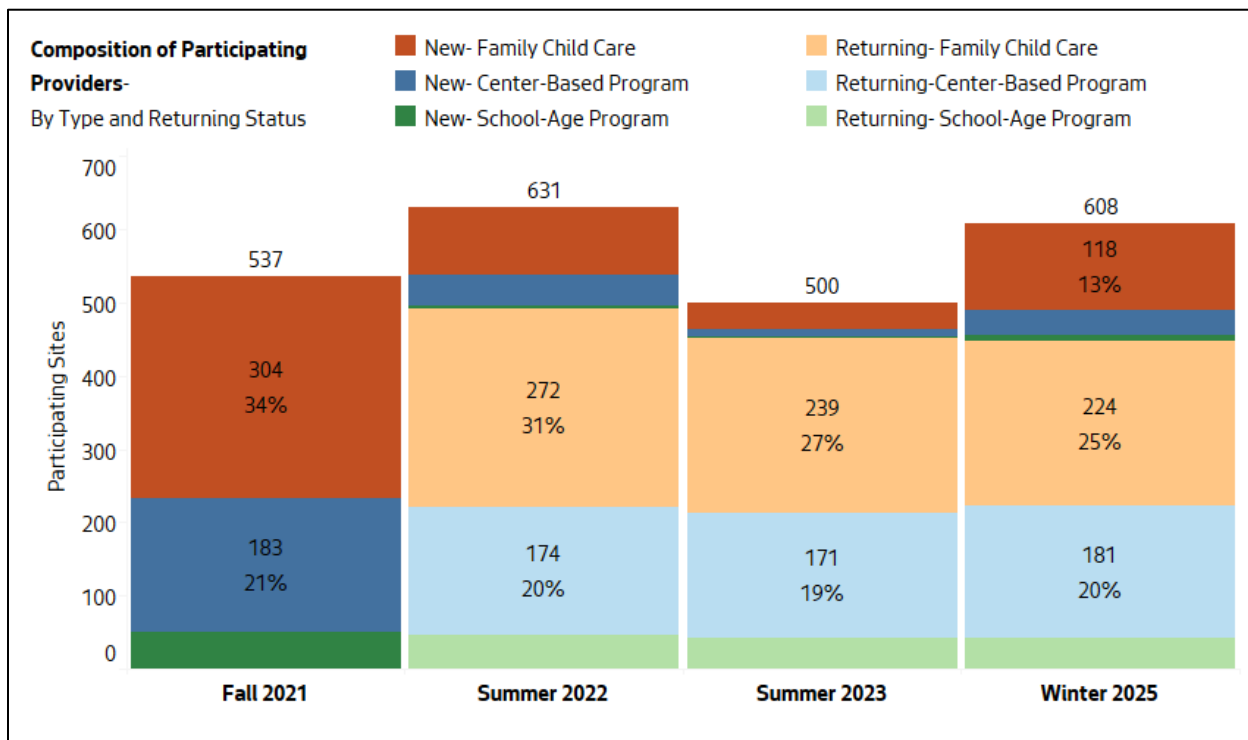
Stabilization Funds to eligible child care providers and their staff. These payments have been issued four times (2021, 2022, 2023, 2025). From 2021-2025, over 70% of workers who received payments were Black, Indigenous, and people of color.

The child care workforce data of the 2021-2025 recipients is as follows:



FCC providers made up the majority of participants in each round, followed by center-based and school-age-only providers. FCCs, which are small, home-based businesses, often employ one or two additional staff members, whereas centers and school-age programs have larger teams and serve more children. FCCs in Seattle are mostly staffed by women of color and/or of immigrant backgrounds and represent a growing segment of the workforce (notably increasing by 25% from 2023 through 2025<sup>6</sup>).

<sup>6</sup> “Worker Supports Evaluation – Summary of 4 Rounds of Funding,” Appendix Attachment 2.



(Source: DEEL data)

**2c. How have you involved community members and stakeholders?**

Across four funding rounds (2021–2025), the City distributed over \$15M in retention payments to over 630 licensed providers—over 80% of all licensed providers in Seattle—and nearly 5,000 workers annually at peak participation. The investment design for workforce payments improved with each funding round based on provider feedback collected via surveys and direct engagement in provider meetings. To improve grant-making, DEEL referenced application data and spoke directly to key stakeholders such as payment administer BrightSpark, SPP Directors, child care providers via groups such as the Greater Seattle Child Care Business Coalition, Imagine Institute, and SEIU 925.

In a 2025 provider survey administered by DEEL, 90% of providers agreed the payments were beneficial. At the same time, providers were clear: one-time payments alone cannot solve systemic workforce challenges like low wages and high turnover. One provider shared, “the retention payment is nice to have, but is not an incentive for anything. To be a tool for retention, it has to be consistent, predictable, and impactful. This payment is similar to giving \$0.30/hour increase for the year. It's another example of state, local, and federal governments failing to do anything meaningful for child care.”<sup>7</sup>

As part of FEPP Levy renewal engagement conducted in 2024-2025 by DEEL in partnership with South Sound Strategies (SSS), DEEL engaged child care stakeholders on topics such as child care access, affordability, and quality as well as business and workforce stabilization. Over nine months of community engagement for all parts of the 2025 FEPP levy, SSS conducted a multi-method engagement process that centered child care workers and historically underrepresented communities.<sup>8</sup>

- Provider-specific engagement

<sup>7</sup> “Worker Supports Evaluation,” Appendix Attachment 2.

<sup>8</sup> FEPP 2025 Stakeholder Engagement Report, May 2026.

- CCAP providers: 2 virtual + 1 in-person event (32 providers)
- Seattle Preschool Program providers: 2 virtual events + 2 surveys (26 providers)

Across these engagements, child care stakeholders emphasized:

- Compensation is the root issue for staff turnover: bonuses help, but wages and benefits drive retention;
- Staffing shortages limit provider enrollment which reduces access for families;
- Burnout is widespread due to high workload and low pay; and
- Career pathways and professional development are essential for sustainability.

## **2d. What does data and your conversations with stakeholders tell you about existing racial inequities that influence people's lives and should be taken into consideration?**

Data analysis and stakeholder engagement elevated four factors for consideration during design of the child care worker payment program: (1) worker demographics, (2) provider administrative burden, (3) worker wages, and (4) payment cadence and amount.

Stakeholder conversations reveal that existing racial inequities in the child care sector significantly shape providers' experiences and must be carefully considered in program design. FCC providers face a disproportionate administrative burden, because, as small business owners, they must independently manage complex tasks such as billing, licensing compliance, tax reporting, and subsidy paperwork without dedicated administrative support, which increases stress and reduces the time they can focus on child care. Seattle providers for whom English is not their first language are essential to our ecosystem. However, these heritage-language speakers can struggle with tax withholding guidance and vendor setup processes that are not offered in their primary language, highlighting ongoing language and system-access barriers.

Confusion around city geographic boundaries further creates risks of inequitable exclusion, leaving some providers ineligible because they have a Seattle zip code but aren't within the technical boundaries of a Seattle Council District. While low-barrier pandemic-era systems increased access, they also introduced vulnerabilities to fraud, illustrating the balance between accessibility and accountability. Administrative infrastructure gaps have required substantial labor from DEEL staff.

Underlying all of these administrative challenges are structural inequities in wages: child care workers remain underpaid relative to their educational requirements and job demands, and many earn so little that they rely on public assistance to support their own families. Many child care professionals in King County experience significant financial difficulties, where half of child care workers who took the Best Starts for Kids Wage Boost Pilot Pre-Launch Survey in 2025 were considered at risk for either food or financial insecurity before the wage boost pilot.<sup>9</sup> In 2024, one provider shared, "we're constantly losing great staff to better-paying jobs in the public school system or other industries. If we want quality child care, we need to invest in the people providing it."<sup>10</sup>

When considering one annual payment versus two payments a year, some stakeholders supported splitting the payments to address timing gaps and support year-round retention. Others preferred a lump sum, emphasizing that a larger amount feels more meaningful and that splitting could increase tax

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<sup>9</sup> E. Miles, E. Mefferd, and J. B. Doromal, *Health and Well-Being of the King County Child Care Workforce: Best Starts for Kids Wage Boost Pilot Pre-Launch Survey Findings* (Urban Institute & Cardea Services, 2025), <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2025-10/Health-and-Well-Being-of-the-King-County-Child-Care-Workforce.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> FEPP 2025 Stakeholder Engagement Report, May 2026.

and administrative complexity. Equity considerations shaped the design of the King County Wage Boost Pilot program, and their program administers quarterly payments, suggesting that staggered payments may better stabilize the workforce, while a lump sum may be more effective for appreciation or income boosts.

The concept of prioritizing payment by program participation, such as higher payments for workers supporting FEPP-levy funded services such as the Seattle Preschool Program (SPP) or Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) elicited strong feelings. This was explored based on the practices of: Travis County, TX (CARE Program Bonuses); Contra Costa County, CA (Wage Enhancement Stipends Program); King County, WA (Child Care Wage Boost Pilot) who have a similar worker compensation program. Critics noted that workers do not control site participation, and creating tiers could widen equity gaps, create tension, and be perceived as unfair. Proponents argued that prioritization could incentivize serving subsidized or high-need populations and be an incentive to recruit more providers into SPP and CCAP. However, these supporters ultimately agreed that a tiered approach carries greater risk of reinforcing institutional racial inequities.

Finally, stakeholders considered how to allocate funding if more than 5,000 workers applied. Several options were discussed: dividing payments evenly (reducing amounts), implementing a lottery (localized or weighted), prioritizing high-turnover sites, lowest-wage roles, classroom staff over management, or subsidy-serving sites, and capping eligibility at 5,000 while maintaining a meaningful payment. Strong caution was raised to avoid reducing payments below an impactful threshold and to carefully design lotteries to prevent mistrust.

## **2e. What are the root causes of factors creating these racial inequities?**

"With women making up over 95% of the child care workforce nationally, and 50% of providers in Washington being people of color, this workforce has long suffered from a gendered and racialized degradation of their work."<sup>11</sup> One root cause contributing to inequities in child care worker compensation, is the historic undervaluing of care work which is predominantly performed by women of color.<sup>12</sup> Structural racism has shaped societal perceptions of labor associated with child care, often minimizing its economic and social importance. This devaluation contributes to persistent disparities in wages, recognition, and opportunities for advancement within the sector.

Limited access to capital and essential business infrastructure further compounds these inequities for small providers, restricting their ability to grow, stabilize, or compete on equal footing. Language barriers and avoiding public benefits due to fears around immigrant harassment create additional obstacles, preventing some individuals from fully participating in programs or accessing available resources. These challenges are reinforced by fragmented public payment systems. Many providers who currently benefit from the city's worker payment program are pulling together more than five program funding streams to sustain their business. They may participate in the City's Child Care Assistance Program, the county's Best Starts for Kids program, the state's Working Connections Child Care plus the state's Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program - in addition to also collecting private tuition. This can be confusing and difficult to navigate, particularly for smaller or independent providers.

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<sup>11</sup> Capito, J., & Workman, S. (2023). "Understanding the true cost of child care in the City of Seattle and King County",

<sup>12</sup> Capito, J., & Workman, S. (2023). "Understanding the true cost of child care in the City of Seattle and King County",

### Step 3. Determine Benefit and/or Burden.

Given what you have learned from data and from stakeholder involvement...

#### 3. How will the policy, initiative, program, or budget issue increase or decrease racial equity?

What are potential unintended consequences? What benefits may result? Are the impacts aligned with your department's community outcomes that were defined in Step 1.

**Benefits:** The Child Care Worker Retention Payment program supports a predominantly women-of-color and immigrant workforce, stabilizes early learning infrastructure in historically underserved communities and focuses on structural wage inequities. Benefits include:

- Direct payments projected at \$500-\$720 annually will increase worker income stability;
- Payments may serve as incentive to join the child care workforce or stay in it; and
- Sites participating in more than three consecutive rounds of payments may show improved staffing retention.

**Potential Burdens / Unintended Consequences:** If not designed with smaller service providers at the center, the payment application process and administrative system could perpetuate racial inequities. Areas to monitor include administrative design choices that impact equity, tiering systems that risk widening gaps, payment sizes that impact child workers in terms of perceived value, language access and tax clarity as central to equitable access, and infrastructure modernization. DEEL is currently evaluating the following factors:

- Fraud risk or duplicate payments (for workers at multiple sites);
- Administrative strain on small FCCs;
- Confusion during address verification excludes eligible providers;
- Tax withholding misunderstandings leading to worker anxiety; and
- Staffing changes between application and payment cycles complicate eligibility.

Overall, the program advances racial equity through income support but requires systemic improvements to avoid inequitable access barriers. With intentional administrator selection, multi-lingual infrastructure, meaningful payment levels, and transparent prioritization (if needed), this program can be an equitable workforce stabilization tool.

### Step 4. Advance Opportunity or Minimize Harm.

#### 4. How will you address the impacts (Including unintended consequences) on racial equity?

What strategies address immediate impacts? What strategies address root causes of inequity listed in Q. 6? How will you partner with stakeholders for long-term positive change? If impacts are not aligned with desired community outcomes, how will you re-align your work?

**Program Strategies:** To address the immediate impacts of racial inequity, the program focuses on practical, direct strategies that provide equitable and accessible support. A flat rate payment model has been established to reduce disparities and ensure consistency across recipients, while maintaining a minimum impactful amount of \$500 to guarantee meaningful financial assistance. Clear appreciation messaging is also prioritized, reinforcing respect and recognition for participants.

Through a competitive administrator selection process, a vendor for years 2-6 will be selected to deliver a mobile-access, multilingual platform that reduces barriers to access and increases inclusivity. Realtime support via chat and text will help ensure participants can get timely assistance, while a tax webinar will help providers understand their accounting needs. Offering non-bank payment options

further expands accessibility for individuals who may be excluded from traditional financial systems. If the program adopts a retention focused approach, a twice a year structure may also be considered to promote sustained engagement and longer-term retention.

**Policy Strategies:** Policy strategies are designed to promote fairness while minimizing unintended inequities in program implementation. A key priority is to avoid tiered systems based solely on program participation, as these can inadvertently reinforce disparities rather than reduce them. When prioritization is necessary, the approach should rely on transparent, equity-based criteria (such as wages, subsidy percentages, and turnover rates) to ensure that decisions are grounded in measurable need and are clearly communicated to stakeholders.

In addition, careful planning and relying on available data are essential to maintaining both equity and efficiency. Developing a clear plan in the event more than 5,000 applications are received will ensure the program can respond effectively. Data should be used thoughtfully to screen and prioritize participants when needed to implement consistent and objective processes. At the same time, safeguards against fraud must be implemented in a way that does not create additional barriers to access, balancing accountability with inclusiveness for all child care providers.

**Partnership Strategies:** The partnership strategies draw on recommendations gathered through stakeholder interviews and emphasize collaboration with experienced and community-rooted organizations. One key step is to leverage the King County-Best Starts for Kids Levy experience working with Wage Boost Pilot program administrators as well as to engage Imagine Institute for additional insight as they have a tripartite contract role in supporting the Pilot program. These partnerships can provide valuable guidance on effective implementation and help avoid common challenges.

The program also aims to explore collaborations with organizations that offer specialized expertise in areas such payment administration to promote efficient and reliable distribution of funds or offer tax and benefits counseling. Together, these partnerships are intended to strengthen program delivery, enhance participant support, and build a more responsive and equitable system.

## **Step 5. Evaluate. Raise Racial Awareness. Be Accountability.**

**5a. How will you evaluate and be accountable?** How will you evaluate, and report impacts on racial equity over time? What is your goal and timeline for eliminating racial inequity? How will you retain stakeholder participation and ensure internal and public accountability? How will you raise awareness about racial inequity related to this issue?

DEEL's Levy performance monitoring approach will ensure accountability, measure progress, and track the program's impact on racial equity over time. A central focus is on collecting and analyzing data that reflects participation and outcomes across different groups. This includes tracking participation rates by race, site type, and geography, as well as comparing FCC participation to the overall FCC population to assess representativeness. The program will also monitor workforce stability by examining turnover rates before and after payment cycles alongside child care provider satisfaction with the program administrator. Language access usage, tax assistance utilization, and payment processing times will help evaluate how effectively the program is meeting participants' needs and reducing barriers to access.

If a lottery or prioritization system is used (if the worker number exceeds 5,000), the program will also evaluate the demographic distribution of recipients to ensure that selection processes are equitable and

aligned with stated goals. Using this data will support transparency and allow for adjustments as needed to better address disparities.

The timeline for evaluation and accountability is structured to support both short-term learning and long-term impact. Annual levy reporting will provide regular public updates on progress and outcomes, while a first-year infrastructure review following the RFI/P/Q process will assess the effectiveness of initial implementation. Throughout this process, ongoing engagement with stakeholders and clear public reporting will be essential to maintaining accountability, building trust, and raising awareness about the underlying inequities the program seeks to address.

**5b. What is unresolved?** What resources/partnerships do you still need to make change?

Several unresolved issues remain that require careful consideration to ensure the program is both effective and equitable. One ongoing challenge is how to verify eligibility without placing an undue burden on providers, which could discourage participation or slow implementation. Additionally, the program must determine how to manage worker counts that exceed 5,000, particularly in a way that maintains fairness and administrative feasibility. The right balance between fraud prevention and accessibility is another key concern, as overly strict safeguards may unintentionally create barriers for those most in need. The program must also address immigration-related fears that could prevent eligible individuals from engaging, ensuring that processes are safe, trustworthy, and clearly communicated. The current political climate is not friendly to immigrant communities and people of color. Reaching child care providers who have recently been harassed by other government agencies create additional barriers to this program.

To successfully navigate these challenges, several critical resources will be required. Adequate funding for infrastructure and administrative capacity is essential to support program operations at scale. Legal review will be necessary to ensure compliance and to mitigate risks, particularly in sensitive areas such as data use and eligibility requirements. Providing dedicated multilingual technical assistance will help ensure that participants can access and navigate the program regardless of language barriers. Finally, strong data analysis capacity will be needed to inform decision-making, monitor outcomes, and continuously improve the program over time.

## **Attachments**

1. National Comparisons and Best Practices
2. Childcare Worker Supports Evaluation: Summary of Four Rounds of Funding

**Attachment 1. National Comparisons and Best Practices**

<b>Table 1. National Comparisons and Best Practices for Supplemental Wages for Child Care Workers</b>	
<b>Jurisdiction (County)</b>	<b>Dollar amounts, numbers of participants, and Distribution Methods</b>
Travis County, TX: CARE Program Bonuses <sup>13</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$1-3K per staff member, based on funding availability</li> <li>• Providers must be contracted with WFS Capital Area and have at least one CCS-enrolled child</li> </ul>
Contra Costa County, CA: Wage Enhancement Stipends Program <sup>14</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$1,000/month for 18 months per staff member, based on funding availability</li> <li>• Programs licensed to serve infants and toddlers</li> <li>• Educators must work directly with children at least 20 hours per week</li> <li>• Program must be in good standing with California Community Care Licensing</li> <li>• Final selection will be by lottery, ~120 workers</li> </ul>
King County, WA: Child Care Wage Boost Pilot <sup>15</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1400 workers at selected facilities receive a “wage boost” in the form of quarterly payments</li> <li>• Worker payment varies by hours: 1.0 FTE (25+ hour/week) receive \$2,080 quarter (\$8,320 yr); 0.5 FTE (10-24 hour/week) receive \$1,040 quarter (\$4,160/yr)</li> </ul>

<sup>13</sup> Austin/Travis County Workforce Solutions Capital Area Child Care Services, <https://www.wfscapitalarea.com/our-services/childcare/for-providers>

<sup>14</sup> Contra Costa County Wage Enhancement Stipends Program, <https://www.wdbccc.com/wage-enhancement-stipends-program>

<sup>15</sup> King County Best Starts for Kids Wage Boost Pilot, <https://bskwageboost.imaginewa.org/>

## Attachment 2. Childcare Worker Supports Evaluation: Summary of Four Rounds of Funding.

### Overview

Since 2021, DEEL has issued four rounds of payments to licensed childcare providers in Seattle to support staff retention. In each round, providers applied to receive money to distribute to their staff. Based on the number of applicants and available funding, DEEL determined the per-worker payments amount. These rounds occurred in Fall 2021, Summer 2022, Summer 2023, and Winter 2025.

Providers applied via SurveyMonkey. Then DEEL worked with a contractor, BrightSpark, to verify the eligibility and address applications with out-of-expected-range responses. Finally, BrightSpark disbursed the payment. BrightSpark was selected because it:

1. Has an existing coaching relationship with participants in the state’s childcare quality improvement program, Early Achievers.
2. Manages the Best Start for Kids childcare subsidy program, so it has W-9s and direct deposit information for most Seattle providers.

Washington State licenses three major types of childcare providers:

- **Family Child Cares (FCCs):** Small businesses operating out of the provider’s home, typically serving 12 or fewer children birth to 12 years. They usually only have one or two other staff members besides the owner.
- **Centers:** Larger facilities with more staff and multiple “classrooms” dedicated to specific age groups (Infants, Toddlers, etc.). Some serve all ages birth to 12, but others specialize in a smaller age range.
- **School-Age Only Providers:** Often located in or near elementary schools, they serve children 5-12. They provide before and after school, and often full -day care during school breaks or summers.

**Table 1: Numbers Served from 2021 – 2025**

Population	Fall 2021	Summer 2022	Summer 2023	Winter 2025
<b># Sites</b>	537 (78% of Seattle providers)	631 (88% of Seattle providers)	500 (72% of Seattle providers)	608 (80% of Seattle providers)
<b># FCCs</b>	304	365	276	346
<b># Centers</b>	183	215	179	211
<b># School-Age Only Sites</b>	50	51	44	51
<b># Workers</b>	3,495	4,589	3,711	4,953
<b>Approximate children potentially impacted</b>	20,000	22,700	19,750	23,800
<b>Total grant amount</b>	\$2.9 M	\$2.4 M	\$5.3 M	\$2.9 M

<b>\$ Payment per staff</b>	\$835	\$503	\$1380	\$555
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Across the four rounds, 885 individual sites have received funding at least once.

### Key Takeaways

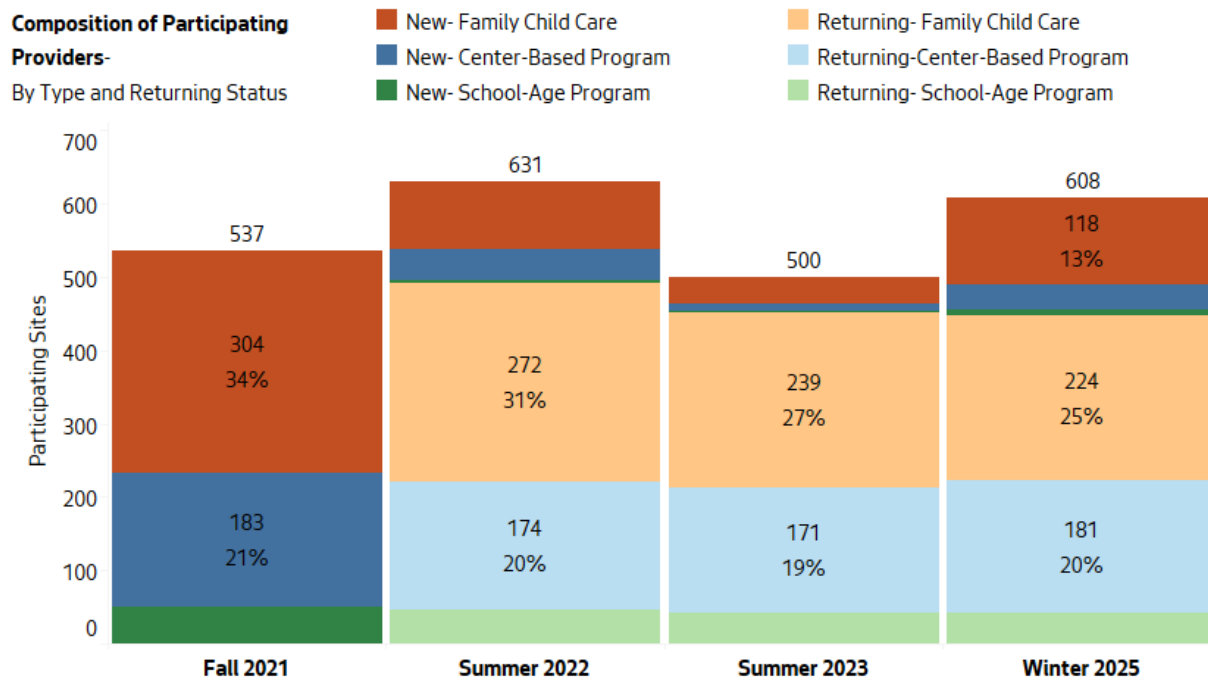
- A majority of Seattle licensed providers (80%+) are utilizing the worker supports.
- Providers overwhelmingly (90%) report that the payments are helpful with staff retention.
- Consistent participants have seen their “quit rates”<sup>i</sup> decrease and staffing levels increase over time.
- A few providers expressed doubts that one-off payments have a consistent impact.

### Participation

#### Participating Sites

Reflecting the overall composition of Seattle licensed providers, the majority of participants each round have been Family Child Care (FCC) providers. Although most participants after Fall 2021 were returners, there was a notable increase in Winter 2025. That round saw the largest percent of new sites at 26%, with the increase concentrated in FCCs, where one-third were new participants.

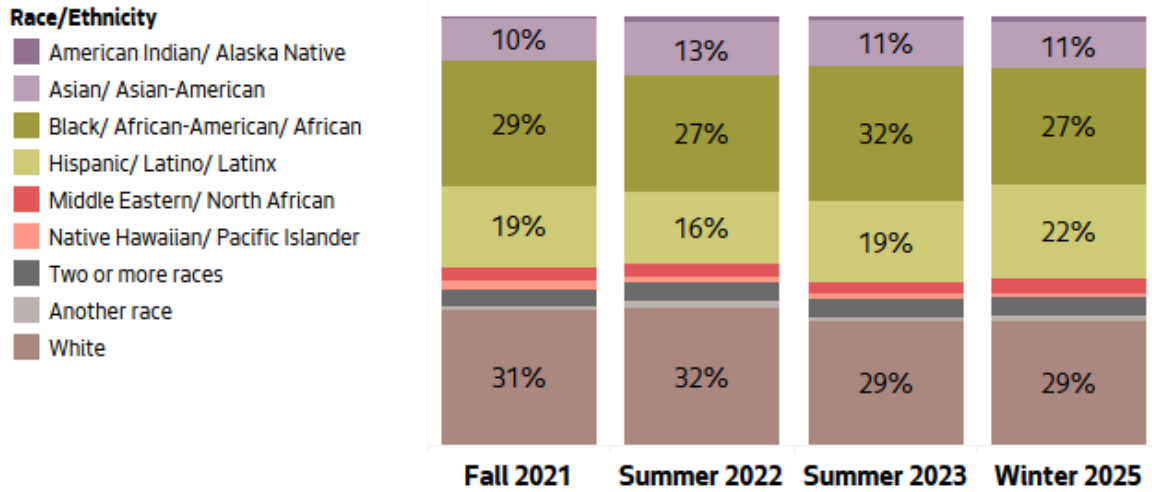
**Chart 1: New and Returning Participants**



#### Demographics of Workers Receiving Payments

The racial and ethnic identities of workers receiving the retention payment have remained fairly consistent over time. There has been a slight increase in the proportion of Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC), from 69% in Fall 2021 to 71% in Winter 2025.

**Chart 2: Race/Ethnicities of Recipient Child Care Workers**



### Impact of Retention Payments

#### Provider Perception

In Summer 2023 and Winter 2025, providers were asked if the *previous* round of funding helped with retention. This was an optional question, so many providers did not respond.

- **Summer 2023** (381 respondents): 86% agreed or strongly agreed the \$503 per staff helped
- **Winter 2025** (329 respondents): 90% agreed or strongly agreed the \$1,380 per staff helped (+4%)

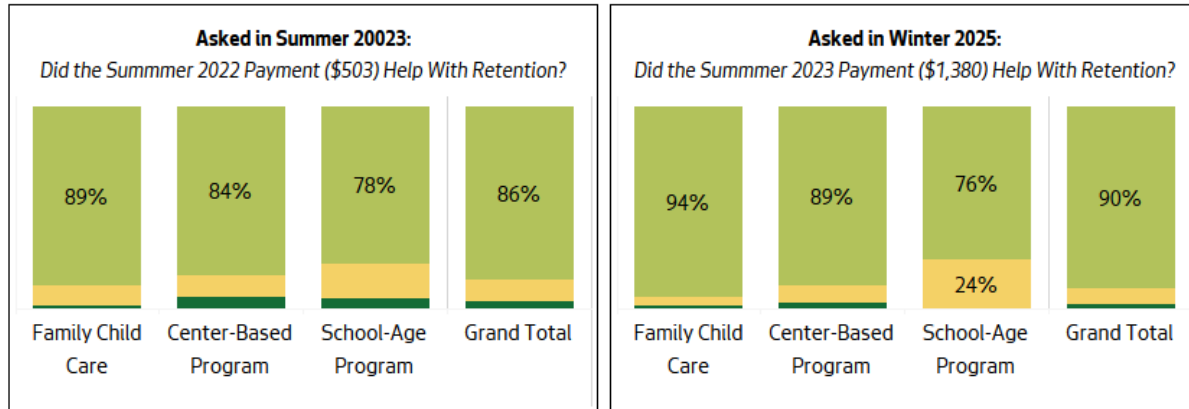
Receiving nearly three times as much money appeared to increase providers’ perception of its effectiveness only slightly. FCCs were the most likely to agree or strongly agree with the statement; school-age programs were the least likely. The disparity between these two groups widened from Summer 2023 to Winter 2025, increasing from an 11-point gap (89% vs. 78%) to an 18-point gap (94% vs. 76%).

### Chart 3: Percent of Sites Agreeing that the Last Payment helped with Retention

How much do you agree or disagree:

The [last round of funding] Seattle Child Care Staff Retention Payment helped my organization retain staff:

■ Agree & Strongly agree     
 ■ Neither agree nor disagree     
 ■ Disagree & Strongly disagree



A few positive quotes from Winter 2025:

- *Employees feel SO appreciated when they get this bonus!*
- *It dramatically increased employee moral! Teachers felt cared for and respected, moral increased significantly.*
- *It is always difficult to fully compensate staff for all their hard work and dedication. The ECE field is under funded and under appreciated. Anything helps.*

Some illustrative quotes from the 9% who were neutral or negative:

- *Payments are always appreciated and help make staff feel seen and valued. It didn't always lead to staff retention just because there are so many other factors that influence that decision, in addition to compensation.*
- *The funding was appreciated but didn't help with retention because it is temporary, one time, and not sustainable to rely on for income.*
- *The retention payment is nice to have, but is not an incentive for anything. To be a tool for retention, it has to be consistent, predictable, and impactful. This payment is similar to giving \$0.30/hr increase for the year. It's another example of state, local, and federal governments failing to do anything meaningful for childcare.*

### Staffing Trends

In the Summer 2022, Summer 2023 and Winter 2025 rounds, providers were asked about how many staff they'd ideally have, how many had quit in the last year, and how long current staff had been employed. By comparing the responses of the same sites over time, clear trends emerge. Although

these trends are correlational and not necessarily caused by DEEL’s efforts, they suggest increase staffing stability among consistent participants.

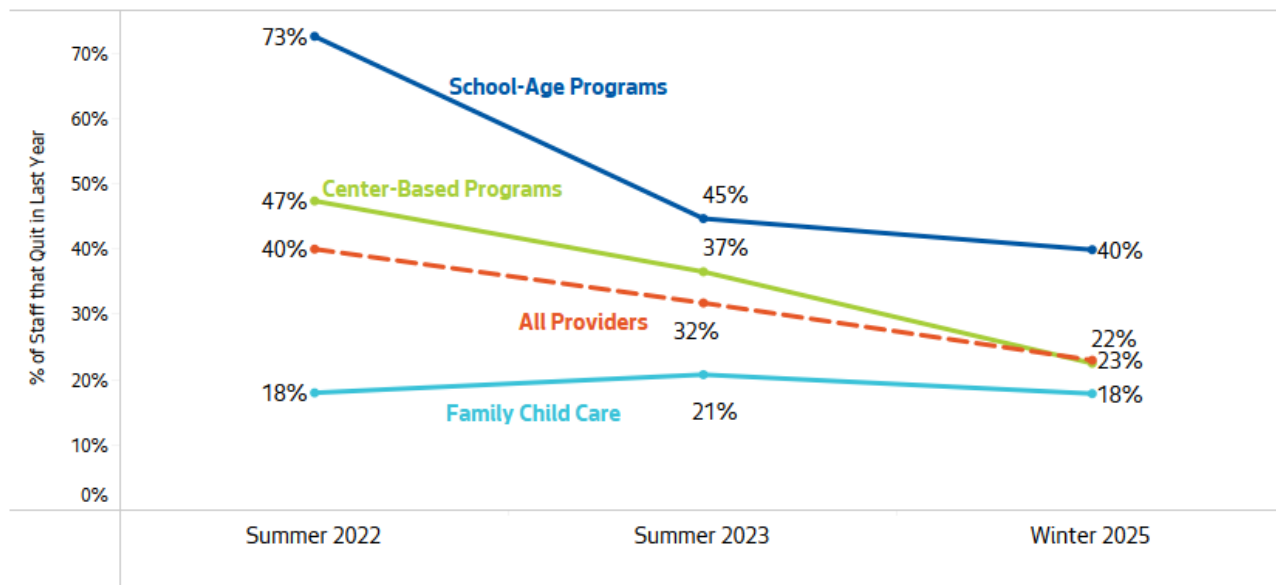
### Quit Rate

Of the 323 sites that participated in all three of the rounds, 253 (78%) answered the optional questions about staffing and quitting in all three rounds. These sites reported that their “quit rate” (the number of staff who quit in the prior year divided by the total to be fully staff) decreased from 40% in Summer 2022 to 23% in Winter 2025.

This rate declined the most for school-age programs, where nearly three-quarter of staff (73%) had quit in the year leading up to Summer 2022, compared to only 40% quitting in the year prior to Winter 2025. However, most of the decrease was between Summer 2022 and Summer 2023. This trend aligns with the decreasing proportion of school-age programs reporting that payments were helpful for retention.

Family Child Care reported consistently low quit rates, which is expected given their small staff sizes. The center-based Programs fell between the two.

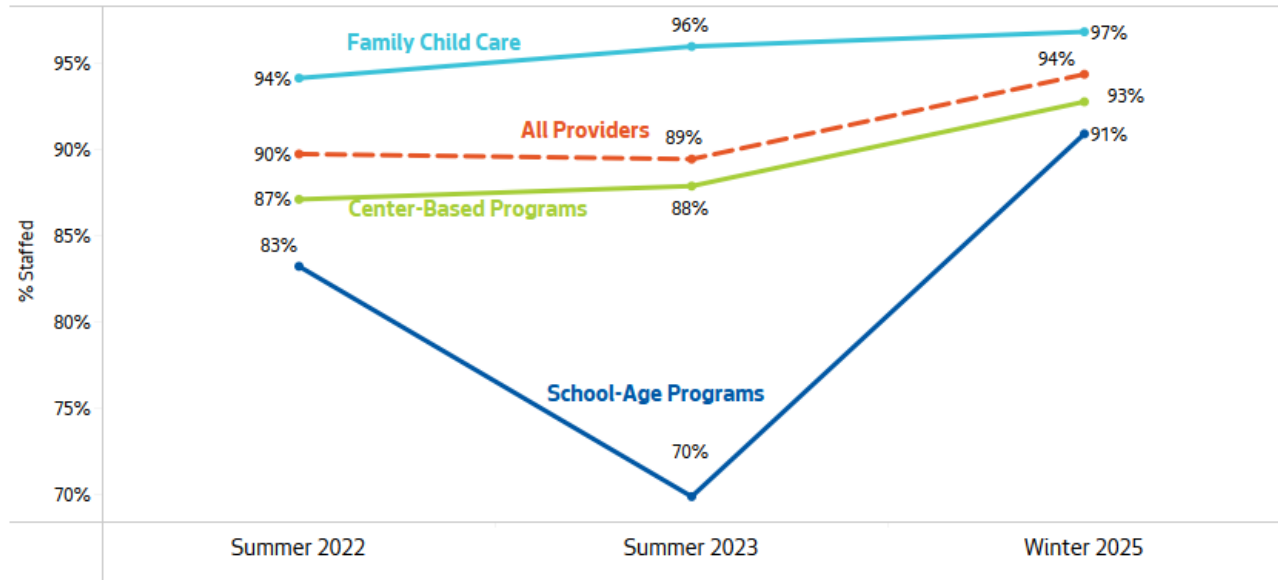
**Chart 4: Quit Rate (# of staff quitting in the previous year divided by the number needed to be fully staff), 253 Consistently Responding Sites**



### Overall Staffing Levels

Providers must have adequate staffing to legally serve children. Other DEEL surveys have found some centers and school-age providers are operating well below their licensed capacity, likely due to staffing shortages. Among the 291 providers who consistently answered the optional questions about ideal staffing levels, respondent reported an increase in staffing levels (measures as current staff divided by ideal staff count). The most significant increase was among school-age providers, who went from 83% staffed in Summer 2022 to 91% staffed in Winter 2025.

**Chart 5: Average Staffing Levels (# of current staff divided by the number needed to be fully staffed), 291 Consistently Responding Sites**



### Conclusion

The four rounds of childcare worker support payments achieved high participation rates and received positive feedback from providers. Consistent participants also demonstrated increased staffing stability over time.