

**Equitable and Accessible Child Care in King County:
Recommendations from the Children and Families Strategy Task Force**

September 30, 2020



King County

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Several King County staff provided support to the Children and Families Strategy Task Force as they worked to develop the recommendations outlined in this proposed implementation plan. From the Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS): Sheila Capestany, Jessica Cafferty, Allison Jurkovich, Tatsuko Go Hollo, Wendy Harris, Shanelle Dodson-Dance, Safaa Sadik, and Charlene Jose completed research, supported subcommittees, attended and supported full task force meetings, and contributed to the planning and development of this process. Marcy Miller from Public Health – Seattle and King County provided ongoing assistance and feedback in the development of this report and critical collaboration to ensure alignment with other efforts, including the Puget Sound Taxpayer Accountability Account Early Learning Facilities investments (undergoing Council review at the time of the writing of this report). Calli Knight and Shannon Braddock from the Executive Office collaborated in planning for the task force and conducting outreach for Employer Roundtable conversations.

As King County faces the concurrent crises of racism and the COVID-19 pandemic, a commitment to equity is more important than ever. The following recommendations build upon other King County investments and initiatives, including the work of the King County Women's Advisory Board, the King County Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan, the Puget Sound Taxpayer Accountability Account, and Best Starts for Kids, to support equitable outcomes for all children, families, and child care providers and caregivers.

Executive Summary

Background

King County faces a crisis of child care access and affordability. Families struggle to afford the cost of care, there are not enough slots to meet the demand, and child care providers continue to earn poverty wages. Access to child care benefits everyone, yet the crises of affordability, supply, and work force fall hardest upon women and people of color.

Child care is a critical infrastructure. Equitable access to high-quality, affordable child care is essential for King County's ability to recover from the current recession and pandemic in ways that improve racial and gender equity while strengthening communities and the economy.

The Children and Families Strategy Task Force developed a spectrum of recommendations to address the regional need for affordable and accessible child care. Recommendations center racial justice and prioritize families and caregivers furthest from access. The recommendations span four key areas:

1. Assuming leadership in broad, foundational, and much-needed systems change
2. Investing in promising programs and supports for families and caregivers
3. Providing swift relief to stabilize and protect the child care sector in response to COVID-19
4. Implementing supports for King County employees with children

Children and Families Strategy Task Force

In response to growing awareness of the need for high-quality and affordable child care, the King County Council passed Motion 15521¹ in September of 2019. The motion established the Children and Families Strategy Task Force. The Council requested that the task force explore a potential King County child care assistance program, which could include the following components: increasing the number of child care facilities and in-home providers, a voucher program for County employees, flexible telecommuting policies, and an infants-at-work program at County workplaces. The Council also asked the Task Force to convene members of the business community to raise awareness of challenges in accessing child care and identify possible employer-led solutions.

Department Overview

The work of the Children and Families Strategy Task Force and development of this report were supported by the Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS), which manages a range of programs and services to serve King County's most vulnerable residents while working to strengthen its communities.

Foundational Guiding Plans, Policies, and Initiatives

King County is guided by a commitment to making a welcoming community where every person can thrive.² To realize this commitment, the recommendations outlined in this report build on current plans and investments, including the *King County Strategic Plan*,³ the *Health and Human Services*

¹ Motion 15521, Metropolitan King County Council (2019). [\[LINK\]](#)

² King County Executive Dow Constantine (2020). *True North and Values*. [\[LINK\]](#)

³ King County Office of Performance, Strategy, and Budget (2015). *King County Strategic Plan*. [\[LINK\]](#)

Transformation Plan,⁴ the *King County Youth Action Plan*,⁵ the *Puget Sound Taxpayer Accountability Account Implementation Plan*,⁶ and the Executive’s declaration of Racism as a Public Health Crisis.⁷ They also advance the goals set forth in the *Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan*⁸ and the Best Starts for Kids initiative, ensuring that children and youth grow up healthier and happier, and that communities are strengthened. Finally, the work of the Children and Families Strategy Task Force was informed by the work of the Women’s Advisory Board.⁹

Key Historical Context

The current crisis of child care access and affordability has roots that run centuries deep. The history of child care, inextricably entwined with the enslavement of Africans in the United States in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, offers insights into the racial and gender inequities now experienced by the child care workforce.

Even as the United States has undervalued the labor of providing childcare, the ability to afford childcare remains out of reach for too many. The United States has long gone without significant efforts to make child care broadly available and accessible for all families.¹⁰ The average American family now spends a third of its income on child care.¹¹ Working Connections, Washington State’s child care subsidy program, subsidizes child care for families up to 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL).¹² However, due to the high cost of living, King County families above 200 percent FPL often struggle to pay the full cost of child care.

In an earlier attempt to reduce costs of child care for some, the King County Child Care Program was established in 1989 to assist low-and moderate-income families in affording child care.¹³ The program provided vouchers to help income-eligible families pay for child care, but it was defunded in 2002.

Key Current Conditions

The current context of child care in King County echoes the past, including challenges to equitable access and affordability, as well as workforce compensation and support. A 2019 study found that employee child care issues resulted in an estimated annual loss statewide of \$6.5 billion in direct and opportunity costs.¹⁴ A concurrent survey found that 49% of Washington parents found it difficult or very difficult to find, afford, or keep child care.¹⁵ An estimated 4,500 eligible King County children under age 5

⁴ King County Executive & Health and Human Services Transformation Panel (2013). *King County Health and Human Services Transformation Plan*. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁵ King County Youth Action Plan Task Force (2015). *King County Youth Action Plan*. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁶ King County Department of Human Services (2020). *PSTAA Implementation Plan*. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁷ Public Health Insider (2020). *Racism is a Public Health Crisis*. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁸ King County Executive’s Office of Equity and Social Justice (2016). *Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan*. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁹ King County Women’s Advisory Board (2018). *Supporting King County’s Women, Families & Employers: Improving Child Care Access and Affordability Throughout King County*. [\[LINK\]](#)

¹⁰ The Center for Law and Social Policy (2017). *Equity Starts Early*. [\[LINK\]](#)

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Department of Children, Youth, and Families. *Working Connections Child Care*. [\[LINK\]](#)

¹³ Motion 7514 (1989). Metropolitan King County Council. [\[LINK\]](#)

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

do not have access to subsidized early learning.¹⁶ Meanwhile, King County’s child care workforce is more diverse than the overall population, disproportionately made up of women and people of color, as well as immigrants and refugees.¹⁷ Wages remain low, with providers earning near-poverty salaries.¹⁸

Research on the brain development of young children has resulted in an emphasis on supporting high-quality care in child care and early learning settings,¹⁹ and a corresponding push for formal education. However, increased educational requirements for child care providers may result in negative equity implications, including the exclusion of child care providers facing increased barriers to accessing formal education.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a significant toll on the child care sector. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) anticipates that more than half of child care programs nationwide will permanently close as a result of the pandemic, and that few businesses will survive closure without financial assistance.²⁰

Children and Families Strategy Task Force Methodology

The Children and Families Strategy Task Force met monthly from December 2019 to July 2020 to develop recommendations for addressing child care access and affordability in King County through a multi-phased approach. The Task Force established five subcommittees to explore specific components of the child care crisis in King County, including:

- High Quality, Anti-Racist, Equitable Care
- Inclusive Care and Supports
- Cost of Care
- Workforce and Compensation
- Human Resources and Employer Best Practices

In June 2020, each subcommittee analyzed the racial equity implications of preliminary recommendations. In July, the full Task Force held a retreat to prioritize and finalize recommendations. The full Task Force convened once more in mid-July, and they voted unanimously to support the 20 final recommendations described in this report.

Task Force Recommendations

The Children and Families Strategy Task Force recommends 20 strategies to address regional child care access and affordability challenges and to work toward a thriving and equitable child care and early

¹⁶ The Early Learning Facilities Development Proposal for King County and the Puget Sound Taxpayer Accountability Account provides recommendations for how PSTAA funds can be utilized to expand access to early learning. The report provides a detailed analysis of where early learning facilities are most needed in King County. It also provides recommendations for how to set up an early learning facilities fund, which are informed by lessons learned from other efforts to address similar needs across the country. [\[LINK\]](#)

¹⁷ Child Care Resources tracks the racial and ethnic makeup of licensed family child care providers in King County, who operate 65% of child care.

¹⁸ Economic Policy Institute (2015). *Child care workers aren’t paid enough to make ends meet.* [\[LINK\]](#)

¹⁹ American Academy of Pediatrics (2018). *Quality Early Education and Child Care From Birth to Kindergarten.* [\[LINK\]](#)

²⁰ National Association for the Education of Young Children (2020). *National Industry Organizations Call on Congress for \$50 Billion in Urgent Stimulus.* [\[LINK\]](#)

learning system. While King County cannot build and maintain a healthy and equitable child care sector alone, the County has an opportunity to provide clear leadership and to galvanize the existing array of fragmented efforts. The County's leadership role may show up in three primary ways: by making direct investments in programs and systems that support the child care sector; by advocating with other policymakers and funders to improve policies and systems and sufficiently resource the child care sector; and by providing leadership in partnership with other agencies as they explore promising solutions to address child care access and affordability.

This report's recommendations include analysis of each specific item requested in Motion 15521 and are organized into four broad categories, including Foundational and Systemic Policy Recommendations, Programmatic Investments, Immediate COVID-19 Relief, and Leadership and a Model for Regional Employers.

Foundational and Systemic Policy Recommendations

1. Anti-Racist Approach and Strengths-Based Language

Ensure that all implemented recommendations are grounded in the Children and Families Strategy Task Force Anti-Racist Framework and Vision, as outlined in the report, and use a strengths-based perspective and language.

2. Anti-Racist Principles for Provider Requirements

Using the anti-racist framework, carefully consider any new requirements for child care providers, family, friend and neighbor caregivers (FFNs), and informal caregivers, such as educational requirements, as well as requirements for child care sites that are not specific to safety or center white supremacy culture.

3. County Revenue for Children and Families

Pursue progressive revenue sources to prevent budget cuts and generate new funding for child care investments.

4. Accountability Structures

Create and invest in a board and a community accountability group to build on the work of the Children and Families Strategy Task Force and uplift families and providers as partners.

5. Equitable Wages and Benefits

Advocate for and support policies at all levels of government that ensure child care providers have access to equitable, living wages and benefits, including health care insurance and paid time off.

6. Child Care and Early Childhood Professional Development System

In partnership with State agencies and other funders, support the expansion of existing child care and early childhood professional development systems to ensure greater coordination across systems and equitable access. Provide leadership to ensure greater coordination and alignment across the early learning, child care, and K-12 spectrum.

7. Pipeline of Black and Brown Child Care Providers

Increase the pipeline of child care and early learning providers, specifically from Black and brown communities, by supporting the removal of barriers that hinder the hiring and retention of those currently working in the field. Pursue strategies to increase the number of BIPOC providers in leadership and ownership roles.

8. Pipeline of Child Care Providers Who Are Men

Increase the pipeline of men in child care and early learning by supporting the removal of barriers that hinder the hiring and retention of those currently working in the field, including development of approaches for undoing gender biases.

9. Professional Development for New Child Care Providers

Provide professional development to providers in training and those who have recently entered the field, including community-based pathways to certification, communities of practice, and support to community and 4-year colleges and other training entities.

Programmatic Recommendations

10. Comprehensive Child Care Program and Support for Providers

Support efforts to centralize resources and support providers with training and education that are representative of provider identities, especially for BIPOC providers. A comprehensive child care assistance program could include additional holistic supports for providers, children and families, including those outlined in Recommendations #11-16.

11. King County Child Care Subsidy Program

Reinstate a regional program to address unmet need, re-envisioning equitable access by focusing supports on lower-income families in King County who are not eligible for or adequately served by other subsidy programs.

12. Supports for Informal Caregivers

Partner with trusted community organizations to provide easily accessible outreach and supports to FFN and informal caregivers. Examples of potential supports include workshops, home visits, materials, and supplies.

13. Financial Incentives to Address Access

Offer financial incentives, including stipends or subsidy enhancements, property tax reductions or rental supports, or publicly-purchased child care slots to child care providers to address specific barriers to access, ensuring safety, and quality.

14. Inclusion-Driven Program for Children with Disabilities

Implement a program with an emphasis on children who have a disability and are affected by additional discriminations, especially racism and child welfare involvement. This program should be directly informed by families and culturally-specific organizations.

15. Healing-Centered Practices to Address Trauma

Invest in holistic supports for children and families, with a coordinated entry point. This system would ensure a “no wrong door” structure for families and would connect them to resources that address basic needs and support healing from trauma and the promotion of infant, early childhood, and family mental health.

16. Funding for Classrooms and Capacity Expansion

Provide funding for new and current childcare providers to develop and supply their classrooms, as well as to expand capacity. Explore strategies to include FFN and informal caregivers.

Immediate COVID-19 Relief for Providers and Planning for Future Emergencies

17. Emergency Supports for Providers

Provide incentives and resources to support basic financial needs of child care providers during current and future declared states of emergency, including the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery. Offer financial supports to providers whose businesses have closed, as well as to members of the existing workforce who have taken over businesses that otherwise would have closed permanently.

Leadership and a Model for Regional Employers

18. Child Care Supports for Employees

Invest in strategies to increase access to and affordability of child care for King County employees, including paid parental leave, support for employees with infants, and a King County child care voucher program.

19. On-Site or Near-Site Child Care

Invest in and incentivize on-site or near-site child care, including exploration of opportunities to partner with existing child care sites and partners, and incentives for affordable housing developers to include child care sites in their developments.

20. Engaging Regional Employers

Incentivize employers to take the above actions to support child care access for employees. Partner with the business community to further engage regional employers as leaders in supporting child care access and affordability.

Roundtable with Businesses and Other Stakeholders

Motion 15521 requested that the task force “convene a roundtable with businesses and other identified stakeholders to raise awareness of the challenges King County employees, residents, and providers face in accessing and providing child care and identify policies at the state and local levels that might help address those issues.” The Task Force held a series of virtual one-on-one conversations with key businesses, employers, and other stakeholders identified in partnership by the Executive office and DCHS staff.

Across the board, employers who participated in roundtable discussions expressed a recognition of the need for child care access and a desire to participate in developing solutions. There was consensus around several challenges: the high cost of care, scarcity of slots, and burdensome regulation of the field. Employers also cited several consistent supports to address employee needs, including generous leave packages, flexible scheduling, and partnerships with child care providers.

Conclusion

The child care crisis, both nationally and regionally, has reached a boiling point. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated system failures and disparities experienced by children, families, and child care providers. The recommendations in this report are grounded in a deep commitment to centering and valuing the experiences of those furthest from access and opportunity. The Task Force’s recommended interventions and policies particularly address the needs of BIPOC children, families, and child care providers, immigrants, refugees, undocumented families, families living homeless, and those with disabilities or special needs.

The full impacts of COVID-19 and the concurrent crisis of racism are not yet fully known, and an ongoing commitment to learning, adjustment, accountability to community, and investment will be critical to achieving equitable and accessible child care for all King County families. It will be critical to secure financial investment and partnership from other governmental agencies and funders to build and maintain a sustainable child care sector. The recommendations outlined in this report provide strategies for King County to lead on increasing equitable child care access and affordability. Although efforts to broaden access to child care and early learning have failed to meet the growing need experienced by families, King County now has the opportunity to build upon its existing work through Best Starts for Kids, PSTAA, and other investments in children, youth, and families. By demonstrating bold leadership, the County can mobilize Federal, State, and local partners as well as private funders in working collaboratively toward a healthy, equitable, and thriving child care system for all.

Background

Over the past several decades, King County families have faced increasing challenges to accessing and affording child care. As outlined in this report, the problem is multi-faceted. Families struggle to afford the cost of care and the number of available slots does not meet demand. The workforce of child care providers, many of them women of color, is underpaid and often devalued.²¹ Children of color, kids from low-income families, and those who have developmental delays or disabilities face increased barriers to access and are often shut out of the system.

The Children and Families Strategy Task Force has developed a spectrum of both short- and long-term recommendations to effectively address the regional need for affordable and accessible child care.

Recommendations span across four key areas:

- Assuming leadership in broad, foundational, and much needed systems change
- Investing in promising programs and supports for families and caregivers
- Providing swift relief to stabilize and protect the child care sector in response to the COVID-19 pandemic
- Implementing supports for King County employees with children

These recommendations also assert the importance of centering King County's value of racial justice and prioritizing families and caregivers furthest from access, in order to avoid exacerbating existing disparities in King County. Additionally, an equitable system of child care would encompass both licensed and informal care options, and for the purposes of this report the Task Force considers "child care" to include this full range of care.

Children and Families Strategy Task Force

The King County Council passed Motion 15521²² in September 2019 establishing the Children and Families Strategy Task Force, a diverse group of experts tasked with exploring strategies for King County to make high-quality child care more affordable and accessible. The Council requested the task force to explore a potential King County child care assistance program, which could include the following components: increasing the number of child care facilities and in-home providers, a voucher program for County employees, flexible telecommuting policies, and an infants-at-work program at County workplaces. The Council also asked the Task Force to convene members of the business community to raise awareness of challenges in accessing child care and identify possible employer-led solutions. The full text of Motion 15521 can be found in Appendix A.

The Council established the Task Force in response to growing awareness of the need for high-quality and affordable child care across King County. In 2018, the King County Women's Advisory Board (WAB) released a report identifying child care as a major need for King County families.²³ The WAB report recommended the creation of a task force to explore and develop recommendations to support increased child care access.

²¹ Vogtman, J. and White, C. (2019). *Can We Rewrite the Shameful History of Undervaluing Child Care Workers?* [\[LINK\]](#)

²² Motion 15521, Metropolitan King County Council (2019). [\[LINK\]](#)

²³ King County Women's Advisory Board (2018). *Supporting King County's Women, Families & Employers: Improving Child Care Access and Affordability Throughout King County.* [\[LINK\]](#)

The Council approved Task Force members fulfilling 19 requirements outlined in Motion 15521. The Task Force was carefully assembled to include a diverse range of local experts. Participants connected to their own communities and areas of expertise, which ensured that their recommendations would be informed by the experience of families, licensed child care providers and informal caregivers, as well as key systems specialists. A full list of Task Force members, their affiliations, and the motion requirements fulfilled can be found in Appendix B.

Department Overview

The work of the Children and Families Strategy Task Force and development of this report were supported by the Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS). DCHS manages a range of programs and services to serve King County’s most vulnerable residents while working to strengthen its communities. The Children, Youth, and Young Adults Division (CYAD) provides services to young people through youth development programs, secondary education completion, post-secondary training and education, and employment support. CYAD is home to several youth and young adult programs, and, in collaboration with other DCHS divisions and Public Health – Seattle and King County (PHSKC), operates the Best Starts for Kids initiative, which will invest approximately \$400 million over the life of the six-year levy to support King County children, families, and community.

Foundational Guiding Policies, Plans, and Initiatives

King County’s work is guided by a commitment to making a welcoming community where every person can thrive. Toward this end, the Children and Families Strategy Task Force has developed a vision, guiding principles, and recommendations to support an equitable, accessible child care system for its residents. These strategies and recommendations are aligned with the *King County Strategic Plan*,²⁴ the *Health and Human Services Transformation Plan*,²⁵ the *King County Youth Action Plan*,²⁶ the *Puget Sound Taxpayer Accountability Account Implementation Plan*,²⁷ and the Executive’s declaration of Racism as a Public Health Crisis.²⁸ They also advance the goals set forth in the *Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan*²⁹ and the Best Starts for Kids initiative, ensuring that children and youth grow up healthier and happier, and that communities are strengthened. Finally, the work of the Children and Families Strategy Task Force is informed by the work of the Women’s Advisory Board.³⁰

King County Strategic Plan

In 2010, the King County Council unanimously approved Ordinance 16897,³¹ adopting the King County Strategic Plan, 2010-2014: Working Together for One King County. Created with input from thousands of

²⁴ King County Office of Performance, Strategy, and Budget (2015). *King County Strategic Plan*. [\[LINK\]](#)

²⁵ King County Executive & Health and Human Services Transformation Panel (2013). *King County Health and Human Services Transformation Plan*. [\[LINK\]](#)

²⁶ King County Youth Action Plan Task Force (2015). *King County Youth Action Plan*. [\[LINK\]](#)

²⁷ King County Department of Human Services (2020). *PSTAA Implementation Plan*. [\[LINK\]](#)

²⁸ Public Health Insider (2020). *Racism is a Public Health Crisis*. [\[LINK\]](#)

²⁹ King County Executive’s Office of Equity and Social Justice (2016). *Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan*. [\[LINK\]](#)

³⁰ King County Women’s Advisory Board (2018). *Supporting King County’s Women, Families & Employers: Improving Child Care Access and Affordability Throughout King County*. [\[LINK\]](#)

³¹ King County Office of Performance, Strategy, and Budget (2010). *King County Strategic Plan*. [\[LINK\]](#)

residents and county employees over a period of 18 months, it was developed in collaboration with Council and the County’s separately elected officials. The plan focuses on reforming county government by focusing on customer service, partnerships and ways to bring down the cost of government.

The Strategic Plan embodies the priorities of the residents of King County and the values of the elected officials in the King County government. It was designed to guide decisions in times of fiscal prosperity and challenge. The plan also established a countywide vision for creating a diverse and dynamic community with a healthy economy and environment where all people, businesses, and organizations can thrive. To that end, the recommendations set forth by the Children and Families Strategy Task Force are intended to further this overall objective.

Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan

In 2010, equity and social justice (ESJ) was included in the 2010 King County Strategic Plan, making it a formal component of the County’s work. That same year the King County Council approved Ordinance 16948,³² which formalized equity systems and frameworks, including establishing the Determinants of Equity, the social, economic, geographic, political and physical environment conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age that lead to the creation of a fair and just society.³³

In 2015, the King County Executive’s Office of Equity and Social Justice (OESJ) was created. The following year, OESJ produced the *2016-2022 Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan*.³⁴ This plan was created with input from more than 700 employees and 100 local organizations. The feedback gathered from employees and the community provided a body of data, evidence, and practices that informed strategies for King County to become a more equitable employer, service provider, and regional partner.

The ESJ Strategic Plan is based on the notion that King County’s future is threatened by a false sense of universal prosperity. While many people in King County are prospering and thriving, a closer look at how benefits are distributed across the region shows deeply entrenched social, economic, and environmental inequities. Equity requires that every person has access to the benefits of society regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, ability or other aspects of who they are. As such, King County is committed to removing barriers that limit some residents’ ability to fulfill their potential. The Children and Families Strategy Task Force developed an anti-racist framework to inform implementation of child care interventions and ensure supports further racial equity in King County.

Racism as a Public Health Crisis

In June 2020, King County Executive Dow Constantine and Public Health – Seattle & King County Director Patty Hayes declared racism a public health crisis. The statement recognized the disparate health impacts of COVID-19 and the concurrent crisis of racism, and committed the County to implementing a racially equitable response, providing resources to community leaders and organizations to develop solutions, using qualitative data from community, developing shared, measurable accountability with partners, and driving resources to where they are needed most, as indicated by community.³⁵

³² Ordinance 16948, Metropolitan King County Council (2010). [\[LINK\]](#)

³³ King County Office of Performance, Strategy and Budget (2015). *The Determinants of Equity: Identifying Indicators to Establish a Baseline of Equity in King County*. [\[LINK\]](#)

³⁴ King County Executive’s Office of Equity and Social Justice (2016). *Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan*. [\[LINK\]](#)

³⁵ Public Health Insider (2020). *Racism is a Public Health Crisis*. [\[LINK\]](#)

Health and Human Services Transformation Plan

As directed by Motion 13768,³⁶ DCHS and Public Health-Seattle and King County, along with a community advisory group and the King County Executive's Office, collaborated to create the King County Health and Human Services Transformation Plan, which was accepted by the King County Council in July 2013 (Motion 13768).³⁷ The Plan seeks to improve health and wellbeing and create conditions that allow residents of King County to achieve their full potential through a focus on prevention. To this end, King County seeks to transform the way individuals/families are engaged in health and human services, focusing on two impact levels: the individual/family level and the community or system level.

In its early work, the Health and Human Services Transformation Plan highlighted an imbalance in King County investments, which historically tipped heavily toward crises and emergencies rather than addressing root causes. As a result, King County committed to investing upstream. Early interventions are well-positioned to improve health and socioeconomic outcomes for vulnerable populations, especially when reinforced with other social services, and result in higher levels of high school and postsecondary attainment as well as higher income for the individuals benefiting from such interventions.³⁸

Youth Action Plan

In 2014, the King County Council approved Ordinance 17738,³⁹ which called for the development of a Youth Action Plan (YAP)⁴⁰ to set priorities for serving King County's young people, from infants through young adults. A task force representing a broad range of organizations with expertise and experience relevant to infants, children and youth, and reflecting King County's geographic, racial and ethnic diversity worked together to complete the YAP in April 2015. The YAP informs the County's annual investments in services and programs across the full continuum of children, youth and young adults.

Recommendation areas in the YAP stipulate that the well-being of children, families, youth, and young adults, should not be predicted by their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability, geography, income, or immigration status. Furthermore, policy development, services, and programming should intentionally include diverse youth voices, and voices of those people impacted by policies and services, in authentic and meaningful ways.

Best Starts for Kids

In November 2015, King County voters authorized a property tax levy to support King County's Best Starts for Kids (BSK) initiative. BSK focuses on increasing positive resources and opportunities to help kids grow up healthy and happy, decreasing negative factors that may prevent kids from establishing a strong foundation in life, and intervening early when kids and families need more support. Best Starts builds on the strengths of families and communities so that babies are born healthy, children thrive and establish a strong foundation for life, and young people grow into happy, healthy adults.

³⁶ King County Executive (n.d.). *Health and Human Services Transformation*. [\[LINK\]](#)

³⁷ Motion 13768, Metropolitan King County Council (2013). [\[LINK\]](#)

³⁸ Urban Institute (2015). *The Promise of Early Interventions for Improving Socioeconomic Outcomes of Black Men*. [\[LINK\]](#)

³⁹ Ordinance 17738, Metropolitan King County Council (2014). [\[LINK\]](#)

⁴⁰ The King County Youth Action Plan Task Force (2015). *King County Youth Action Plan*. [\[LINK\]](#)

Over the life of the Best Starts Levy, DCHS and Public Health - Seattle and King County will invest approximately \$400 million to support King County families and children in four strategy areas:

1. Invest Early
Support pregnant individuals, babies, very young children, and their parents during critical developmental years with a robust system of support services and resources that meets families where they are—home, community, and child care.
2. Sustain the Gain
Continue progress made with school- and community-based opportunities to learn, grow and develop through childhood, adolescence and into adulthood.
3. Communities Matter
Support communities to build safe, thriving places for children to grow up.
4. Results-Focused and Data Driven
Use data and evaluation to know what is working for kids and communities.

Puget Sound Taxpayer Accountability Account

The Puget Sound Taxpayer Accountability Account (PSTAA) was created as an amendment to the 2015 State Transportation Revenue Package by the Washington State Legislature and directs that these Sound Transit-related funds be used for educational services to improve educational outcomes in early learning, K-12, and post-secondary education.⁴¹

Approximately \$318 million of PSTAA funds are expected to become available to King County between 2019 and 2034. General goals and principles for the use of PSTAA funds in King County were approved by the King County Council on December 11, 2017.⁴²

In August 2019, the Council refined program categories to be funded under PSTAA and established that 52% of revenue would be allocated to Early Learning Facilities.⁴³ The PSTAA Implementation Plan included three strategies in its recommendations for Early Learning Facilities: maintaining and improving existing family child care home facilities; renovating existing (non-home based) facilities; and, investing in partnerships that result in the construction of new facilities.⁴⁴

Women’s Advisory Board Report

In 2018, the King County Women’s Advisory Board (WAB)⁴⁵ transmitted its report, *Supporting King County’s Women, Families & Employers: Improving Child Care Access and Affordability Throughout King County*.⁴⁶ The report found that King County’s supply of child care options failed to meet demand, and that child care in King County is among the most costly in the nation.⁴⁷ One of the WAB’s key recommendations was to establish a task force to more deeply explore and identify potential solutions

⁴¹ The State’s vision for PSTAA is described in RCW 43.79.520. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁴² Motion 15029, Metropolitan King County Council (2017). [\[LINK\]](#)

⁴³ Motion 15492, Metropolitan King County Council (2019). [\[LINK\]](#)

⁴⁴ King County Department of Human Services (2020). *PSTAA Implementation Plan*. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁴⁵ Established in 1978, the King County Women’s Advisory Board (WAB) makes recommendations to the King County Executive and the King County Council to ensure the County takes into account the needs, rights and well-being of women. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁴⁶ King County Women’s Advisory Board (2018). *Supporting King County’s Women, Families & Employers: Improving Child Care Access and Affordability Throughout King County*. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁴⁷ Jeffrey Beck et al. (2013-2017). *Affordable Child Care for all in King County*, 32.

to increase child care access and affordability for King County children and families. Through Motion 15521, the Council endorsed this input from the WAB by requesting the establishment of the Child and Family Strategies Task Force, whose work and recommendations are summarized in this report.

Key Historical Context

The current crisis of child care access and affordability has roots that run centuries deep. Inequities in the valuing and compensation of the child care workforce have close ties to the enslavement and racialized and gendered stereotypes about the provision of care. Subsidy programs have not sufficiently met family need, and have in fact contributed at times to keeping low-income families in poverty. And access to child care is not universal or equitable – children of color are disproportionately likely to face barriers to high-quality, accessible care that meets their families’ needs even as women of color are disproportionately asked to care for the children of others for near-poverty wages.

The King County ESJ Strategic Plan calls for a commitment to being racially just.⁴⁸ To inform recommendations that move the child care and early learning sector toward becoming anti-racist, the Task Force ground its understanding of child care and its development of anti-racist guidance in the historical context that has directly contributed to current conditions.

Racism in the History of American Child Care

The history of child care in the United States is complex, and inextricably linked with racism and systems of racial oppression.⁴⁹ In order to develop and work toward a vision for an equitable and anti-racist system, it is important to first recognize the historical legacy of racism that has shaped child care and early learning access and policy.

During the enslavement of Africans in the United States in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, enslaved Black women were regularly separated from their own children in order to care for the children of white enslavers. Their care extended as far as serving as wet nurses to white children. This action had tremendous impacts on their own families. Their children regularly were malnourished, and even died as a result. These women played significant, often lifelong roles in the raising of white children, at the direct expense of their own babies.⁵⁰ Even after the abolition of slavery, child care remained one of the few occupations available to women of color and was not extended critical labor protections, and the theme of devaluing child care providers and caregivers persists today.⁵¹

In the wake of the Great Depression, government-funded child care programs excluded domestic workers from protections, keeping critical resources out of the hands of Black families and caregivers as the majority of paid child care happened in the home.⁵² In the last century, child care assistance

⁴⁸ King County Office of Equity and Social Justice (2016). *Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan*. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁴⁹ The Center for Law and Social Policy (2020). *An Anti-Racist Approach to Supporting Child Care Through Covid-19 and Beyond*. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁵⁰ West, E. and Knight, R.J. (2017). *Mother’s milk: slavery, wetnursing, and black and white women in the Antebellum South*. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁵¹ The Center for Law and Social Policy (2020). *An Anti-Racist Approach to Supporting Child Care Through Covid-19 and Beyond*. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁵² The Center for Law and Social Policy (2017). *Equity Starts Early*. [\[LINK\]](#)

programs in the United States have frequently been perceived by the public as offering an unfair and undeserved share of resources to families of color at the expense of white people.⁵³

Historical Access for Children with Disabilities

The 20th century saw a growing movement of parents of children with disabilities demanding equitable education and child care access. In 1975, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act guaranteed children with disabilities the right to public school education. With concerted efforts of disability activists, more than 50 pieces of legislation were passed between the 1960s and the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. However, stigma and discrimination toward children with disabilities continues. Inclusion in early learning programs is often unavailable.⁵⁴

Federal and State Investments in Child Care

Despite evidence that investment in child care and education has the single biggest impact on women's employment,⁵⁵ the United States has long gone without significant efforts to make child care broadly available and accessible for all families.⁵⁶ While individual municipalities and regions have implemented subsidized pre-K and child care, there has been no long-term, universal federal investment.

The launch of Head Start⁵⁷ in 1965, a federal program providing early education and supports, included an explicit focus on poor children. It also provided intentional supports for Black children, and for many was the first opportunity they had to access high quality early learning.⁵⁸ Head Start and Washington State's parallel Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP)⁵⁹ have provided significant relief for low-income families, but recent decades have found more families struggling to access care.

Working Connections, Washington State's child care subsidy program, subsidizes child care with community-based, licensed providers for families up to 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL).⁶⁰ FPL is currently \$26,200 for a family of four.⁶¹ Families below 82 percent FPL can access child care without a copay. For families with incomes between 82-200 percent FPL the state offers partial subsidies and requires a copay of families. All families above 200 percent FPL are ineligible for state subsidies. In King County, due to the high cost of living, families above 200 percent FPL often still struggle to pay their full child care costs.

Some research indicates that insufficient public investment in child care may be driven by views that women, and in particular white women, should stay home with their children.⁶² However, the public has

⁵³ The Center for Law and Social Policy (2017). *Equity Starts Early*. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁵⁴ National Park Service (updated 2019). *Disability History: The Disability Rights Movement*. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁵⁵ Olivetti, C. and Petrongolo, B. (2017). *The Economic Consequences of Family Policies: Lessons from a Century of Legislation in High-Income Countries*. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁵⁶ The Center for Law and Social Policy (2017). *Equity Starts Early*. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁵⁷ Head Start is a national program serving low-income children aged birth to five through early learning, health supports, and family services. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁵⁸ The Center for Law and Social Policy (2017). *Equity Starts Early*. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁵⁹ ECEAP is a program funded by Washington State that provides early learning, health supports, and family services. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁶⁰ Department of Children, Youth, and Families. *Working Connections Child Care*. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁶¹ The Federal Poverty Level (FPL) is a measure of income issued each year by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁶² Cain Miller, C. (2019). *Why the U.S. Has Long Resisted Universal Child Care*. The New York Times. [\[LINK\]](#)

rarely held this same belief for Black women, who have historically been expected to participate in this workforce.⁶³ Barriers to child care access continue to have a negative impact on gender equity. Because women tend to make less money than men and shoulder more child rearing responsibilities, they are often first to leave the workforce when families cannot access care, resulting in lifelong reductions to income and financial security.⁶⁴

The United States implemented something close to universal child care during World War II through the Langham Act, which directed federal funding to support child care centers in an effort to bring women into the workforce. However, the act was an emergency measure, and despite demonstrated positive outcomes for children who attended, the funding was never made permanent.⁶⁵ Child care also had broad bipartisan support in the early 1970s, but failed to gain traction when President Nixon vetoed the Comprehensive Childhood Development Act, stating that it had “family-weakening implications.”⁶⁶ Since then, investments have been limited to child care assistance programs with strict work requirements for low-income families and an annual child care tax credit. The average American family now spends a third of its income on child care.⁶⁷

Former King County Child Care Program

The King County Child Care Program was established in 1989 to assist low-and moderate-income families in affording child care.⁶⁸ The program was discontinued in 2002 in the midst of significant recession-era budget cuts.⁶⁹ The King County program was modeled after a City of Seattle program and provided vouchers to help income-eligible families pay for child care. Eligible families were required to live in King County outside of Seattle, work or be involved in training, and meet annual income guidelines. Income eligibility began immediately above the State’s Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) Subsidy Program eligibility threshold and continued up to 70 percent of county median family income. Parents participated in the cost of care using a sliding scale fee and funds were allocated to regions of the county based on need.

Key Current Conditions

The current context of child care in King County is multi-faceted, with challenges to equitable access and affordability, as well as workforce compensation and support. Difficulties faced by families in accessing child care result in larger-scale economic impacts across King County and Washington State. Growing income inequality and the high regional cost of living have driven an increase in disparities experienced by children, families, child care providers, and communities.⁷⁰

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Casella, M. and Mueller, E. (2020). *A lack of child care is keeping women on unemployment rolls*. Politico. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁶⁵ The Center for Law and Social Policy (2017). *Equity Starts Early*. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁶⁶ Cain Miller, C. (2019). *Why the U.S. Has Long Resisted Universal Child Care*. The New York Times. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Motion 7514 (1989). Metropolitan King County Council. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁶⁹ King County Women’s Advisory Board (2018). *Supporting King County’s Women, Families & Employers: Improving Child Care Access and Affordability Throughout King County*. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁷⁰ Cihak, C. (2015). *Income Inequality: Taking Action*. King County Office of the Executive. [\[LINK\]](#)

A lack of access to high-quality child care has become a significant crisis affecting not only King County children and families but also its employers and economy.⁷¹ In the past several decades supply has failed to meet demand, and growth in the cost of care has surpassed the rate of inflation.⁷² There are 20 percent fewer family child care providers now than there were five years ago. While the capacity of child care centers has grown slightly, it pales in comparison to the population growth of children in need of care.⁷³ As cited in the Washington State Child Care Collaborative Task Force’s 2019 report,⁷⁴ since 2014 the state gained 3,000 child care slots, but the population of children under age 6 grew by nearly 30,000.⁷⁵

A 2019 study led by the Institute for Public Policy and Economic Analysis found that employee child care issues resulted in an estimated annual loss statewide of \$6.5 billion in direct and opportunity costs.⁷⁶ A concurrent survey detailed in *The Mounting Costs of Child Care* found that 49% of Washington parents found it difficult or very difficult to find, afford, or keep child care.⁷⁷ These challenges hinder job stability for Washington parents and prevent them from seeking additional education or training associated with higher lifetime earnings and overall family success.⁷⁸ Additionally, children whose families are unable to access care are missing out on the benefits of high quality early learning, which is critical as a child’s brain develops more from birth to five than during the remainder of school years.⁷⁹

For families who find care, cost can be prohibitive or leave them in precarious financial health. The cost of high-quality infant care at a licensed center has surpassed that of tuition at Washington’s public universities, and a typical single parent in Washington spends over half of their income on child care.⁸⁰

Meanwhile, many child care providers continue to live in poverty,⁸¹ and efforts to increase their wages have been stalled due to the cost implications families who already struggle to afford care would face.⁸² Nearly 15 percent of child care providers live below the poverty line, and many cannot afford care for their own children.⁸³ Benefits packages are also elusive: only 15 percent of child care providers receive health insurance, and fewer than 10 percent are covered by a pension plan at their job.⁸⁴

⁷¹ King County Women’s Advisory Board (2018). *Supporting King County’s Women, Families & Employers: Improving Child Care Access and Affordability Throughout King County*. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Washington State Department of Commerce (2019). *The Mounting Costs of Child Care*. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁷⁴ Washington State Department of Commerce Child Care Collaborative Task Force (2019). *Recommendations Report to the Legislature under SHB 2367, Laws of 2018*. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁷⁵ Washington State Office of Financial Management (2019). *Estimates of April 1 Population by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin, State Data Tables 2010-2018*. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Washington State Department of Commerce (2019). *The Mounting Costs of Child Care*. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Child Care Aware of Washington. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁸² Urban Institute (2001). *Models for Increasing Child Care Worker Compensation*. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁸³ Economic Policy Institute (2015). *Child care workers aren’t paid enough to make ends meet*. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Quality in Licensed Early Learning Settings

Research on the brain development of young children has resulted in an emphasis on supporting high-quality care in child care and early learning settings.⁸⁵ In Washington State, the term “high-quality” typically refers to standards of care and learning, Kindergarten readiness, and developmental outcomes for children. It is often measured by participation in the Early Achievers Quality Rating and Improvement System program.⁸⁶

The push for quality has led to increased educational requirements for child care providers. While there is ample evidence to support the critical link between well-trained and supported caregivers and positive outcomes for young children, the prioritization of formal education may result in negative equity implications. In particular, child care providers who have offered care for many years and developed their skillsets and expertise informally may be devalued and even excluded due to increased barriers to accessing formal education. These may include limited language options for coursework, a lack of course offerings during non-traditional hours, or low compensation that does not make the cost of tuition a viable investment.⁸⁷

Cost and Scarcity of Licensed Child Care in King County

A primary driver of King County’s child care crisis is the cost of care, exacerbated by the region’s high income levels and cost of living. While eligibility requirements are intended to prioritize families with low incomes, the reliance on Federal Poverty Level (FPL) does not accurately reflect the cost of living, or the correlating poverty level, in King County. A family of four must earn less than \$49,200 to qualify for Working Connections, the state’s child care subsidy program, regardless of where they live in the state, but a family of four making \$72,000 in King and Snohomish Counties is considered low-income by the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).⁸⁸ Without financial support, many families who fall above the eligibility level for Working Connections struggle to afford child care.

Child Care Aware of America’s 2019 report, *The US and the High Price of Child Care*, examined child care costs and supports in the Seattle metropolitan area, including King, Snohomish and Pierce Counties, where residents are paying a significant amount of their income on child care. The average cost of center-based tuition for an infant was \$23,013 in Seattle and \$16,604 elsewhere in the tri-County region. These numbers translate to 18.9 and 15.9 percent, respectively, of median household income for married parents with children. For single parents with children, this care costs 61.8 and 45.2 percent, respectively, of median household income.⁸⁹ The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services considers 7% of family income the threshold for affordable child care.⁹⁰

Approximately 257,000 children under age 10 live in King County, and 62 percent of households with children under 6 have all parents working outside the home.⁹¹ According to the Best Starts for Kids Health Survey conducted in 2019, in King County, 34.2 percent of children lived in families that found it

⁸⁵ American Academy of Pediatrics (2018). *Quality Early Education and Child Care From Birth to Kindergarten*.

[\[LINK\]](#)

⁸⁶ Department of Children, Youth, and Families. Early Achievers. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁸⁷ Metivier, K. (2020). *Envisioning Higher Education as Anti-Racist*. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁸⁸ Child Care Resources. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁸⁹ Child Care Aware of America (2019). *The US and the High Price of Child Care*. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁹⁰ U.S Department of Health and Human Services (2016). *Child Care and Development Fund Program*. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁹¹ U.S. Census Bureau (2018). *American Community Survey*. [\[LINK\]](#)

difficult to afford child care since the child was born.⁹² Families of color and families with lower household incomes were more likely to report difficulties.

In addition to the high cost of care, a shortage of available child care has exacerbated the child care crisis; the increase in child care slots has not kept up with population growth and demand. As cited in the Washington State Child Care Collaborative Task Force’s 2019 report,⁹³ since 2014 the state gained 3,000 child care slots, but the population of children under age 6 grew by nearly 30,000.⁹⁴ During this timeframe, the overall number of child care providers has declined.⁹⁵ A 2019 survey of Washington parents found that 27 percent of parents quit their jobs or left school due to child care issues, another 27 percent reduced their hours to part-time work, and nine percent were fired or laid off.⁹⁶ These and other consequences of child care challenges amount to an estimated \$2.08 billion in direct costs of turnover and missed work statewide. Some families experience additional barriers to care, including those in need of infant care or overnight care or those who have children with developmental delays or disabilities or who are impacted by trauma.

Disparities in Access and Child Care Access Deserts

As referenced in the proposed PSTAA Implementation Plan⁹⁷, many King County children who need, and are eligible for, subsidized early learning and child care programs are not able to access them. Certain geographic pockets of King County have large gaps in early learning facilities. These areas of need are extreme child care access deserts⁹⁸ – clusters of zip codes⁹⁹ with statistically significant gaps in access to high quality early learning services for children eligible for subsidized services (ECEAP, Head Start, Early Head Start, and Working Connections Child Care).

According to Child Care Resources,¹⁰⁰ as many as 30 percent of families in King County who are eligible for subsidized child care cannot find a spot to accommodate their children.¹⁰¹ The PSTAA Early Learning

⁹² King County Best Starts for Kids Health Survey (2019). [\[LINK\]](#)

⁹³ Washington State Department of Commerce Child Care Collaborative Task Force (2019). *Recommendations Report to the Legislature under SHB 2367, Laws of 2018*. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁹⁴ Washington State Office of Financial Management (2019). *Estimates of April 1 Population by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin, State Data Tables 2010-2018*. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁹⁵ Child Care Aware of Washington (2019). [\[LINK\]](#)

⁹⁶ Washington State Department of Commerce (2019). *The Mounting Costs of Child Care*. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁹⁷ King County Department of Human Services (2020). *PSTAA Implementation Plan*. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁹⁸ Child care access deserts parallel the federal government’s use of the term “food desert,” used to denote places where people do not live in close proximity to affordable and healthy food retailers. See U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Community Services, Healthy Food Financing Initiative [\[LINK\]](#). For an application of the concept to child care, see “America’s Child Care Deserts,” Center for American Progress (CAP) (2016) [\[LINK\]](#). CAP updated its study of this issue in 2018. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁹⁹ 3SI and Early Learning Facilities Stakeholder Group (2018). *Early Learning Facilities Development Proposal*, pg. 10-13 and 78-80. [\[LINK\]](#)

¹⁰⁰ Child Care Resources is an organization working to improve access to high-quality early learning experiences by engaging with families, child care providers, community organizations, and advocacy groups to advance the quality of early childhood care. [\[LINK\]](#)

¹⁰¹ King County Council Committee of the Whole. (2018). ‘Item 3. Public Comment’. In *Meeting Minutes Committee of the Whole – Monday November 5, 2018*. King County Council: Clerk of the Council. [\[LINK\]](#)

Facilities Development Proposal¹⁰² estimates that more than 4,500 eligible King County children under age 5 do not have access to subsidized early learning. Access gaps fluctuate based on changes in funding as well as rapidly changing demographic and contextual factors.

Lack of Investment

Research suggests that investment in high-quality early learning opportunities, especially when followed by sustained investment in K-12 education, may contribute to reducing education inequities.¹⁰³ Unfortunately, while Washington State has invested in subsidized early learning for children from low-income households, public resources to provide infrastructure for early learning programs have not kept up with demand. Lack of funding for early learning facilities limits the capacity to serve children who can benefit from high-quality early learning programs.

Licensed and Informal Care

Although estimates vary, a significant portion of child care in King County is provided by Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) or informal caregivers.¹⁰⁴ Although somewhat dated, a robust parent needs assessment survey provided an indicative snapshot of child care arrangements of young children in Washington State. The survey results indicated that more young children are in Family, Friend and Neighbor care than in formal licensed care.¹⁰⁵

While some FFN caregivers are regulated and paid a small amount by the state, most operate outside of the regulated field. Many families identify informal care as their preferred mode of care, especially when it can offer deep relationships, tailored care, nontraditional hours, and cultural match. Informal caregivers also fill critical gaps in the licensed child care system, and provide a significant portion of infant care, overnight care, and care for children with special needs who may have trouble accessing licensed child care sites. An equitable system of child care would encompass both licensed and informal care options. For the purposes of this report, “child care” includes this full range of care.

Child Care Workforce in King County

King County’s child care workforce is more diverse than the overall population, disproportionately made up of women and people of color, as well as immigrants and refugees.¹⁰⁶ Wages remain low, with providers earning near-poverty salaries.¹⁰⁷ At the same time, a push for high quality care has driven increased educational requirements for child care providers without commensurate compensation or supports. This has exacerbated disparities and especially affects those who may have more limited access to formal education systems because of a lack of investment in coursework offered in other

¹⁰² The Early Learning Facilities Development Proposal for King County and the Puget Sound Taxpayer Accountability Account provides recommendations for how PSTAA funds can be utilized to expand access to early learning. The report provides a detailed analysis of where early learning facilities are most needed in King County. It also provides recommendations for how to set up an early learning facilities fund, which are informed by lessons learned from other efforts to address similar needs across the country. [\[LINK\]](#)

¹⁰³ Johnson, R. and Kirabo, J. (2018). Reducing Inequality Through Dynamic Complementarity: Evidence from Head Start and Public School Spending. *The National Bureau of Economic Research*. [\[LINK\]](#)

¹⁰⁴ Child Care Resources. *Family, Friends, and Neighbors Caring for Young Children*. [\[LINK\]](#)

¹⁰⁵ Washington State Department of Early Learning (2008). *Parent Needs Assessment Phone Survey Report*.

¹⁰⁶ Child Care Resources tracks the racial and ethnic makeup of licensed family child care providers in King County, who operate 65% of child care.

¹⁰⁷ Economic Policy Institute (2015). *Child care workers aren’t paid enough to make ends meet*. [\[LINK\]](#)

languages or during non-traditional hours, or because low compensation does not make the investment in tuition viable.¹⁰⁸ Some providers of color have a hard time transitioning to formal education systems because of the historical systemic racism perpetuated by institutions of higher learning.

Ongoing Impacts of COVID-19

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many child care providers have continued to provide services in the wake of Stay at Home orders and school closures, demonstrating their value as an essential workforce. Their continued service has highlighted the deep racial, economic, and social disparities in relying so heavily on an undercompensated sector that lacks the infrastructure and investment, including sufficient health insurance coverage and other benefits typically extended to educators working within the K-12 system.

As described in the proposed PSTAA Implementation Plan, the COVID-19 public health pandemic has exacerbated already scarce access to child care. As of April 1, 2020, 870 child care sites across Washington State with a licensed capacity of almost 43,000 children have shut down because of the COVID-19 outbreak.¹⁰⁹ Of those providers, 578 sites were serving almost 6,000 children receiving child care subsidies through the Working Connections Child Care program.¹¹⁰ According to Child Care Resources, as of June 15, 2020, 385 child care programs have closed in King County.¹¹¹ Of these, 178 are centers, 97 are Family Child Care Homes, and 110 offer school-age services only. These data points change daily.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) anticipates that more than half of child care programs nationwide will permanently close as a result of the pandemic. They expect few businesses will survive closure without financial assistance.¹¹² Consequently, thousands of providers, preponderantly low-income and BIPOC women, will likely be out of work and unable to provide essential child care for workers when the COVID-19 crisis abates, further challenging economic recovery.

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, a federal stimulus package passed in late March 2020, includes \$3.5 billion targeted toward child care. As of the writing of this report, the impact of these funds on regional child care and early learning is unclear. The ongoing impact of COVID-19 on the child care business model exacerbates this uncertainty, including lower student to teacher ratios, higher operating costs to meet safety standards, uncertain attendance, and decreased revenue. Additionally, many child care providers serving school-aged children are faced with the increased

¹⁰⁸ Metivier, K. (2020). *Envisioning Higher Education as Anti-Racist*. [\[LINK\]](#)

¹⁰⁹ Senn, T. (2020). *After Major Progress on Child Care, COVID-19 Could Collapse the System*. The Seattle Times. [\[LINK\]](#)

¹¹⁰ Working Connections Child Care is a program of the Washington State Department of Children Youth and Families that helps families with low incomes pay for child care. When a family qualifies for child care subsidy benefits and chooses an eligible provider, the state pays a portion of the cost of child care. The parent may be responsible to pay a copayment to their provider each month. [\[LINK\]](#)

¹¹¹ S. Brady, personal communication, June 16, 2020. [Data collected by Child Aware of WA]

¹¹² National Association for the Education of Young Children (2020). *National Industry Organizations Call on Congress for \$50 Billion in Urgent Stimulus*. [\[LINK\]](#)

responsibility of supporting virtual learning as King County school districts temporarily close their doors.¹¹³

Current conditions are particularly precarious for licensed family child care homes.¹¹⁴ These providers are critical in low-income and working-class neighborhoods where home-based child care is sometimes the only form of licensed care available. This care type is often a preferred choice for families for various personal reasons. Their small size and flexible hours make these programs well-positioned to help with the COVID-19 crisis. However, these programs are also particularly vulnerable to permanent closure, with many operating on very little economic margin. Trends such as increased housing costs, increased minimum wage, competition from subsidized preschool programs in schools and centers, increased cost of meeting state-mandated requirements, and stagnant subsidy reimbursement rates have caused many family child care, home-based providers to close.

Children and Families Strategy Task Force Process and Methodology

Upon passage of Motion 15521, the Executive carefully selected members of The Children and Families Strategy Task Force to fulfill requirements of the motion and ensure representation from a diverse group of experts. The Task Force included families, child care providers and caregivers, and policy and systems specialists. Members were deeply connected with their communities and areas of expertise, and brought the perspectives of members of the public, King County employees, members of the WAB, and family and community voice to their exploration of early learning and child care access and affordability.¹¹⁵ During regular meetings, the Task Force heard presentations and received data from staff at the Department of Children, Youth, and Families, King County’s Department of Human Resources, School’s Out Washington, Child Care Resources, and SEIU-925.

As requested in Motion 15521, the Executive convened an interdepartmental staff working group to prepare for and assist the Children and Families Strategy Task Force, including staff from DCHS, Public Health – Seattle & King County (PHSKC), and the Executive’s Office.¹¹⁶ During the COVID-19 pandemic, additional staffing resourced subcommittees, and assisted with meetings and follow-up.

The Children and Families Strategy Task Force met monthly from December 2019 to July 2020. They developed recommendations for child care access and affordability in King County through a multi-phased approach, summarized in the table below and detailed on the following pages.

Table 1: Overview of Children and Families Strategy Task Force Recommendation Development Process

Phase	Areas of Focus	Key Actions
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¹¹³ Shapiro, N. (2020). *Hobbled by 100 closures, Washington’s child care industry thrust into de facto teaching*. The Seattle Times. [\[LINK\]](#)

¹¹⁴ Family child care homes provide licensed care in the professional caregiver’s home for 12 or fewer children. [\[LINK\]](#)

¹¹⁵ A full list of Task Force members can be found in Appendix B.

¹¹⁶ Metropolitan King County Council (2019). Motion 15521, Section A.

<p>Phase One: Convening and Organizing <i>December 2019 – February 2020</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centering racial equity Landscape analysis Existing efforts and policy solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish and onboard subcommittees
<p>Phase Two: Generating Recommendations <i>March – June 2020</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentations from key stakeholders Subcommittee work: research, consultation, and preliminary recommendations Full task force review and refinement of preliminary recommendations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review and provide feedback on PSTAA Implementation Plan
<p>Phase Three: Prioritizing and Finalizing Recommendations <i>June – July 2020</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Racial equity review of recommendations Alignment of subcommittee-developed recommendations Prioritizing and finalizing recommendations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritization retreat Final vote to approve recommendations

Subcommittee Work in Defined Areas of Focus

The Task Force established five subcommittees to explore specific components of the child care crisis in King County. They recognized that a focus simply on cost and availability misses critical pieces of a holistic and sustainable solution, including workforce support and compensation, quality and anti-racist care, access for children with special needs, and the unique opportunities King County has as a large and influential employer. DCHS staff proposed subcommittee topics, and the Task Force refined and finalized the topics.

Members self-selected into the subcommittees that best reflected their areas of expertise. They were not required to participate if they did not have capacity or interest. Subcommittees met monthly and identified one or more chairs to facilitate work and accountability. Subcommittees conducted research into their content area and developed recommendations for the full Task Force to consider. Subcommittees reported their work to the full group each month, provided in-depth presentations on findings and recommendations, and gathered feedback from the full Task Force. The five subcommittees included:

- **High Quality, Anti-Racist, Equitable Care**, which explored strategies to ensure child care options in King County are high quality, anti-racist, and equitable;
- **Inclusive Care and Supports**, which analyzed barriers and policy levers to increase access for children with developmental disabilities or delays, special healthcare needs, or those impacted by trauma;
- **Cost of Care**, which explored policy levers to address the high monetary cost of child care;
- **Workforce and Compensation**, which looked at strategies to support and stabilize the child care workforce; and

- **Human Resources and Employer Best Practices**, which analyzed best practices for employers to mitigate access and affordability challenges for employees seeking child care.

Recommendation Prioritization and Finalization

In June 2020, each subcommittee completed a workshop analyzing the racial equity implications of preliminary recommendations. Subcommittees then worked to refine preliminary recommendations to present to the full group at the prioritization retreat in July. Subcommittee chairs and staff coordinated to identify duplication, gaps, and opportunities to align recommendations across subcommittees.

In July, the Task Force held a retreat to prioritize and finalize recommendations. After reviewing the full list of preliminary recommendations, DCYF staff asked members to consider the following questions:

- *What key themes stand out?*
- *Are there any needed recommendations not reflected here?*
- *Where do you have questions or need more information?*
- *Should any recommendations be removed?*

In small groups, Task Force members then ranked potential recommendations, and in the full group, edited recommendations through a consensus model for decision-making.¹¹⁷ Based on feedback from the full group, DCHS staff revised and refined the proposed list and presented the revisions to the Task Force for additional consideration and revision. The Task Force convened in mid-July to officially vote on a final list of recommendations. The Task Force voted unanimously to advance the 20 final recommendations described in this report.

The Task Force received this report in August 2020 and had the opportunity to provide final edits and feedback or ask questions answered by DCHS staff. Their feedback is incorporated into this report before transmittal.

Appendix C details the full Task Force meeting schedule and topics.

Task Force Recommendations

Recommendations Overview and Motion 15521 Requested Recommendation Components

The Task Force has provided 20 recommendations to King County to address regional child care access and affordability challenges, and work toward a thriving and equitable child care and early learning system. It will be critical to secure partnership and financial investment from Federal, State, and private partners for a long-term and sustainable solution that ensures equitable access and affordability for all families. While King County cannot build and maintain a healthy and equitable child care sector alone, the County has an opportunity to provide clear leadership and to galvanize the existing array of fragmented efforts. Such a response can no longer be delayed without exacerbating the disparities that currently plague our region.

The following recommendations outline strategies for King County to offer leadership on child care access and affordability. The County's leadership role may show up in three primary ways: by making

¹¹⁷ The Task Force identified options to indicate full support, comfortable support, or a veto. Any member could veto a recommendation or decision to stop the process and move to discussion.

direct investments in programs and systems that support the child care sector; by advocating with other policymakers and funders to improve policies and systems and sufficiently resource the child care sector; and by providing thought leadership in partnership with other agencies as they explore promising solutions to address child care access and affordability.

Recommendations were initially developed in the five subcommittees outlined in the Report Methodology section, but upon final review were organized by the Task Force into four broad categories, including Foundational and Systemic Policy Recommendations, Programmatic Investments, Immediate COVID-19 Relief, and Leadership and a Model for Regional Employers. The following recommendations include analysis of each specific item requested in Motion 15521, which can be found within the report sections outlined below.

Table 2: Fulfillment of Motion Requirements

Motion 15521 Recommendation Components	Section	Recommendation	Page
Recommendations regarding access and affordability issues related to child care in King County <i>(Motion 15521 lines 39-40)</i>		Recommendations #1-20	
Potential creation of a King County child care assistance program <i>(Motion 15521 lines 43-44)</i>	Programmatic Recommendations	Recommendation #10	35
A voucher program for King County employees and residents <i>(Motion 15521 line 45)</i>	Programmatic Recommendations; Leadership and a Model for Regional Employers	Recommendation #11; Recommendation #18c	35, 42
Opportunities for increasing the number of available child care facilities, including in home care facilities, and employer partnerships related to those facilities <i>(Motion 15521 lines 46-48)</i>	Programmatic Recommendations; Leadership and a Model for Regional Employers	Recommendation #16; Recommendation #19	39, 43
Identifying potential opportunities within County policies, such as telecommuting and the infants at work pilot program, to address the shortage of infant care <i>(Motion 15521 lines 49-51)</i>	Leadership and a Model for Regional Employers	Recommendation #18b	41

Motion 15521 Recommendation Components	Section	Recommendation	Page
<p>The task force shall also convene a roundtable with businesses and other identified stakeholders to raise awareness of the challenges King County employees, residents, and providers face in accessing and providing child care and identify policies at the state and local levels that might help address those issues <i>(Motion 15521 lines 52-58)</i></p>	<p>Roundtable with Businesses and Other Stakeholders</p>		<p>44</p>

Foundational and Systemic Policy Recommendations

The following recommendations are long-term, foundational, and focused on broad systems change. The Task Force developed these recommendations in dedication to working toward a thriving and equitable system of child care, which has long been underfunded, heavily regulated, and at risk of collapse. King County will not be able to accomplish systemic change independently, and will need to secure partnership and financial investment from other partners and funders. For each recommendation, King County may take a critical leadership role in advocating for systems change, examining its own systems and processes, and partnering with other agencies and funders as they explore promising solutions. Recommendations will also require and benefit from intentional partnership with other key entities, including state agencies, municipalities, and the philanthropic and business communities.

1. *Anti-Racist Approach and Strengths-Based Language*
2. *Anti-Racist Principles for Provider Requirements*
3. *County Revenue for Children and Families*
4. *Accountability Structures*
5. *Equitable Wages and Benefits*
6. *Child Care and Early Childhood Professional Development System*
7. *Pipeline of Black and Brown Child Care Providers*
8. *Pipeline of Child Care Providers Who Are Men*
9. *Professional Development for New Child Care Providers*

Recommendation 1: Anti-Racist Approach and Strengths-Based Language

Ensure that all implemented recommendations are grounded in the Children and Families Strategy Task Force Anti-Racist Framework and Vision, outlined below and in Table 2, and use a strengths-based perspective and language.

The Task Force developed a vision statement to guide progress toward a healthy child care and early learning system, focusing on equity and the experience of children, families, and providers. A condensed version follows. The full vision statement can be found in Appendix D.

We envision a thriving early learning ecosystem that centers children, families, and providers and supports their emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual health. Policies and practices of the early learning system are explicitly anti-racist. The system links to resources and other sectors to offer a network of wraparound supports that truly hold the child, family, and community in support of every child’s healthy development, beginning prenatally. Ample funding, over the long-term, is available to support all aspects of the system, and related systems that support basic needs, mental health (for children, families, and providers), and Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT).¹¹⁸ Children and families who were formerly furthest away from accessing high-quality child care are now well-served regardless of where they live.

The High Quality, Anti-Racist, Equitable Care Subcommittee also developed an anti-racist framework, outlined below and in Table 2 the Task Force adopted by the framework. To ensure child care strategies center children, families, and child care providers furthest from access and dismantle systems of white supremacy, the Task Force intends for its recommendations and related strategies to be implemented in accordance with this framework.¹¹⁹ In particular, the Task Force recommends that new strategies:

- be designed in ways that ensure the financial or social burden will not be placed on the same people who should be centered,
- make access less complex and help to ensure the needs of all communities are met, and
- prioritize holding intersectionality at the core by centering communities of color.

The Task Force focused its consideration of equity on children and families at the intersection of the following experiences and identities:

¹¹⁸ King County Developmental Disabilities and Early Childhood Supports. *Early Support for Infants and Toddlers*. [\[LINK\]](#)

¹¹⁹ Full documentation of the High Quality, Anti-Racist, Equitable Care subcommittee’s planning and visioning work can be found in Appendix D.

- BIPOC children and families, especially Black and brown males and Native and Indigenous people;
- Families with low incomes, those using subsidies, and people living in child care deserts;
- Families experiencing or at risk of homelessness; including those who are unhoused, living in temporary or emergency housing, or sharing housing that is not sustainable. Families with unstable housing who may need child care in multiple locations (e.g. migrant workers and their families or individuals who are co-parenting) should be prioritized;
- Single parents, particularly those who are young, working, or in high school or college;
- Families in need of care during nontraditional hours, including evenings, weekends, or overnight;
- Immigrants and refugees, including those who have recently immigrated or are undocumented;
- People with limited English skills or whose primary language is not English, especially those who only speak an Indigenous language;
- Children and families with accessibility needs, including chronic illness and prioritizing low-income families whose children have special needs;
- Families and caregivers who are students; and
- Families eligible for state subsidy but experiencing barriers, including a lack of child care options that accept subsidies or those just above eligibility criteria.

The Children and Families Strategy Task Force Anti-Racist Framework has four key pillars: diversity, radical belonging, inclusion, and equity. These pillars provide important focus when developing strategies to support child care access. They are designed to both prevent harm from implementing policies and practices with racist impacts and support and further the wellbeing of children, families, and child care providers. Table 3 details each pillar, as defined by the Task Force, and the ways in which they support high-quality, anti-racist child care for children, families, and providers.

Table 3: Children and Families Strategy Task Force Anti-Racist Framework and Guiding Pillars

Pillar	Impact for children and families	Impact for child care providers
<p>Diversity: Representation of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) within the child care and early learning systems, and deep consideration of and commitment by caregivers, systems leaders, and policy-makers to how such representation can support anti-racist, high quality child care.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BIPOC children and families see themselves, their families and communities well- represented in learning content and materials; and • BIPOC child care providers are present and valued as role models. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BIPOC child care providers are fully represented in leadership and ownership roles within the child care system; and • Anti-racist principles and policies embedded in all aspects of their work.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ The National Association for the Education of Young Children provides numerous resources, tools, and trainings on undoing racism in early learning settings. [\[LINK\]](#)

Pillar	Impact for children and families	Impact for child care providers
<p>Radical Belonging: Valuing, honoring, and holding space for difference, conflict, and repair.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child care providers build relationships from a foundational understanding of the impacts of systems of oppression and trauma that BIPOC children and families experience in all their intersectional identities; • Child care providers approach all children in their care with a belief in their inherent ability and desire to learn; • Family/provider communication is regular, robust, and viewed as essential for the child’s well-being, growth and development; and • Anti-racism and child/family culture are integrated within the learning environment and organizational processes and systems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foundational training and ongoing professional development name and identify systems of oppression and their impacts on BIPOC in all of their intersectional identities; • Anti-racism and child/family culture are integrated within the learning environment and organizational processes and systems; and • The early learning system’s processes acknowledge and address – through policies and practices - the impacts of systems of oppression and trauma that BIPOC families and child care providers experience.
<p>Inclusion: Equitable decision-making power, the equitable spending of resources reflecting these values, and consideration of how narratives are crafted and who has the power to tell these stories.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informed by family voice, the child care system offers an array of high-quality options that support family choice; • Child care providers honor families as partners, influencers, and decision-makers in the care of their children; • Collective leadership and other cultural ways of leadership are valued and prioritized in child care settings; and • Decision-making and other processes in child care settings are transparent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foundational training and ongoing professional development offerings are explicitly anti-racist; and • Systems that license, supervise, and support child care providers are transparent and prioritize collective leadership.

Pillar	Impact for children and families	Impact for child care providers
<p>Equity: A child care and early learning system, as well as the systems it interacts with, built using principles of targeted universalism.¹²¹ Targeted universalism prioritizes the experiences of those who are furthest away from the high quality child care that all families deserve.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Processes and practices at child care settings reflect the needs, cultural norms, and experiences of children and families, and are accountable to families for meeting their needs; and High quality, culturally responsive child care is accessible and affordable for all families. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foundational training and ongoing professional development are explicitly anti-racist; Providers receive equitable wages and benefits, including access to health care; Quality assessment processes are anti-racist; and Child outcome assessment processes are anti-racist.

Recommendation 2: Anti-Racist Principles for Child Care Provider Requirements

Using the anti-racist framework, carefully consider any new requirements for child care providers, family, friend and neighbor caregivers (FFNs), and informal caregivers, such as educational requirements, as well as requirements for child care sites that are not specific to safety or center white supremacy culture.¹²² Before instituting requirements for providers and child care programs, policy-makers should consider the following questions and their potential impact:

- In what ways do requirements perpetuate white culture, rather than supporting education, social-emotional development, physical and mental health, and nurturing the development and safety of all children?*
- What supports are needed to ensure providers are set up for success to fulfill requirements, and prepared to lead in anti-racist work?*
- As the early learning and child care sector professionalizes, what is needed in order to remove and prevent barriers to the professional advancement of BIPOC child care providers?*

As referenced in the Key Current Conditions section, an increased emphasis on formal education and intensive licensing regulation for child care providers in Washington State has created new barriers for the workforce. Providers who do not have the ability to easily access higher education, or for whom it is not a viable investment given the low wages earned in the sector, may be forced to exit the field. Increased requirements may prevent new caregivers from entering the sector.

The Task Force raised concerns that providers who have offered high quality care for many years without formal education may be disproportionately impacted and ultimately pushed out of the field. The Task Force recommends the County provide leadership and partner with State licensing agencies and other entities as appropriate to ensure that requirements of child care providers should center equity and prioritize the wellbeing of children and families, offer community-based pathways and

¹²¹ According to the King County ESJ Strategic Plan, targeted universalism refers to “defining outcomes for all, identifying obstacles faced by specific groups, and tailoring strategies and building on assets to address barriers.” [\[LINK\]](#)

¹²² White supremacy culture is the idea (ideology) that white people and the ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions of white people are superior to People of Color and their ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions. [\[LINK\]](#)

resources to ensure BIPOC child care providers are well-supported, and avoid creating new barriers to the hiring and retention of child care providers and caregivers.

Recommendation 3: County Revenue for Children and Families

Pursue progressive revenue sources to prevent budget cuts and generate new funding for child care investments. Such strategies avoid placing the burden of the region's economic recovery on poor and working class, immigrant and refugee, homeless, and BIPOC people. These are the populations the County should center when supporting child care and early learning. To this end, King County should support efforts that would create new authority from the State to levy more progressive taxation.

Washington State projects a substantial shortfall in the state fiscal year 2021 because of the COVID-19 pandemic and related economic recession.¹²³ The Task Force supports King County in advocating with Washington State for revenue increases, in particular for child care and early learning. This is especially important as child care and early learning systems are not included in the State's definition of basic education.¹²⁴ In addition to quality education, working families depend on quality child care to keep their children safe.

As King County considers future child care investments, the Task Force recommends analyzing revenue sources to ensure the financial burden is not disproportionately placed on those furthest from access. It is important to center child care and early learning in budgeting and recovery efforts, prioritizing communities of color while respecting the impact these small businesses have in the economic and educational recovery of Washington State.

Recommendation 4: Accountability Structures

Create and invest in the following accountability structures to build on the work of the Children and Families Strategy Task Force and uplift families and providers as partners:

- a. Board to Build on the Work of the Children and Families Strategy Task Force** – *Create and invest in an ongoing board or commission to continue and build on the work of the Children and Families Strategy Task Force. This group should be comprised of BIPOC community specialists, providers and families and focus on elevating BIPOC voices and needs and developing inclusive and anti-racist leadership. Members of this ongoing entity should have decision-making power around implementation of recommendations and should be compensated for their time, emotional labor, perspective, and work products.*¹²⁵

The board or commission will provide ongoing leadership to explore issues of child care access and affordability and advise King County leadership on policy solutions. Short-term solutions from among the current recommendations may affect families, providers, and the community, and long-term systemic solutions may need ongoing support and analysis. The group should be required to seek regular and ongoing feedback and accountability from community members. The Task Force recommends a community accountability group, as described in Recommendation #4b, to fulfill this expectation.

¹²³ O'Sullivan, J. (2020) *Washington reckons with a budget shortfall that evokes painful memories of the Great Recession*. The Seattle Times. [\[LINK\]](#)

¹²⁴ Anand, A. (2020) *What does it mean to fully fund education?* The Seattle Times. [\[LINK\]](#)

¹²⁵ A July 2020 report by the Office of Performance, Strategy, and Budget provides three options for compensating individuals serving on ongoing boards, commissions, and committees. [\[LINK\]](#)

- b. Community Accountability Group** – King County can solicit ongoing feedback and accountability by engaging a community accountability group that is a collective of families, providers, and leaders in child care and early learning. This group will serve as a mechanism for partnership with those directly impacted by recommendations and interventions, and create a feedback loop to hold County systems accountable and ensure the implementation is community-driven.

This group would be made up of families, child care providers, and cultural navigators and institute a formalized process to regularly seek feedback and accountability as King County implements child care solutions. The group may interface directly with an ongoing Board to inform their analysis and recommendations.

Recommendation 5: Equitable Wages and Benefits

Advocate for and support policies at all levels of government that ensure child care providers, including center-based and family child care providers, have access to equitable, living wages and benefits, including health care insurance and paid time off. Support increased investments from the State to compensate providers. Ensure child care providers are included in the process of determining their wages and benefits, and partner closely with the unions and professional organizations that represent them.

- *Benefits should include health care and retirement security.*
- *Providers should have access to a state-sponsored substitute pool.*
- *King County should develop a plan and timeline for equitably implementing an anti-racist career and wage ladder.¹²⁶*

As referenced in the historical context section of this report, the history of child care in the United States is closely tied to the enslavement of Black women, servitude, and patriarchal concepts of “women’s work.” The current compensation structure for the early learning workforce, which offers poverty wages, few benefits, and little health coverage, is a direct result of this historical context. Center and family home providers struggle with narrow margins and the inability of families to afford to pay higher tuition rates that would allow for the ability to offer these types of well-deserved job enhancements.

The Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) Compensation Technical Workgroup’s 2019 report found that Washington’s early childhood educators rank in the third percentile of occupational wages. Additionally, 39 percent of Washington’s early childhood educators rely on one or more sources of public assistance support programs, costing \$34.7 million annually and resulting in high rates of turnover that negatively impact the continuity of care and child outcomes. Students with degrees in early childhood education have the lowest projected earnings of all college graduates. The Compensation Technical Workgroup recommended competitive compensation comparable to K-3 educators, benefits, and access to a state-sponsored substitute pool.¹²⁷

Recommendation 6: Child Care and Early Childhood Professional Development System

¹²⁶ King County established a Career and Wage Ladder in April 200 through Ordinance 13812. The ordinance was never funded. [\[LINK\]](#)

¹²⁷ Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families Compensation Technical Workgroup (2019). [\[LINK\]](#)

In partnership with State agencies and other funders, support the expansion of existing child care and early childhood professional development systems and supports for family, friend and neighbor caregivers (FFNs) to ensure greater coordination across systems and equitable access for and about people of color and children and families with disabilities. Provide leadership to ensure greater coordination and alignment across the early learning, child care, and K-12 spectrum, including aligning and integrating credits and certifications across child care, early learning, and K-12 systems for professional development trainings. Ensure child care providers are included in the process of determining needed professional development opportunities, and partner closely with the unions and professional organizations that represent them to develop provide support in accessing resources.

- *Build a common knowledge and competency base across child care providers, including how to understand and access community resources.*
- *Ensure that state certifications, credentials, workforce preparation programs, and supports for FFNs have a strong focus on cultural competence, anti-racism and inclusion to facilitate career advancement within and across professions.*
- *Offer cross-sector professional development and technical assistance.*
- *In partnership with professional organizations and unions, support peer mentorship and child care provider-centered professional development opportunities.*
- *Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) staff, special educators and other support staff should co-teach with and coach early childhood teachers.*

Ultimately, the Children and Families Strategy Task Force recognizes the importance of high-quality care, and the need to supporting multiple pathways to professional development and different metrics of quality that do not center whiteness. Finally, the Task Force views quality as a more holistic measure that should include anti-racist and inclusive care that meets each child and family’s needs.

Investments in partnerships with community-based organizations (CBOs), colleges and training entities, and other government agencies are needed to intentionally prioritize additional professional development supports as outlined in Recommendations #7-9.

Recommendation 7: Pipeline of Black and Brown Child Care Providers

Increase the pipeline of child care and early learning providers, specifically from Black and brown communities, by supporting the removal of barriers that hinder the hiring and retention of those currently working in the field. Pursue strategies to increase the number of BIPOC providers in leadership and ownership roles at child care and early learning programs.

Data indicate that children of color often have better academic performance, improved attendance, and are less likely to be suspended when they have teachers who are of the same race as they are.¹²⁸ Disparities in child care discipline are more exaggerated than in public schools: children in child care settings are three times more likely to be suspended or expelled than their K-12 counterparts, and exclusionary discipline is most likely to impact children who are Black, boys, or bigger than their peers.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Figlio, D. (2017). *The importance of a diverse teaching force*. Brookings. [\[LINK\]](#)

¹²⁹ Malik, R. (2017). *New Data Reveal 250 Preschoolers Are Suspended or Expelled Every Day*. Center for American Progress. [\[LINK\]](#)

Supporting the retention of BIPOC child care and early learning professionals is critical to an equitable experience for all children. In particular, the Task Force encourages the County to partner with other agencies and funders to explore community-driven and culturally responsive professional development opportunities, strategies to secure equitable wages, and opportunities to invest in leadership development for BIPOC providers within the field. It is particularly important to ensure Black and brown child care and early learning professionals are not disproportionately affected by the COVID-10 crisis, resulting in a less diverse workforce than before the crisis.

Recommendation 8: Pipeline of Child Care Providers Who Are Men

Increase the pipeline of men in child care and early learning by supporting the removal of barriers that hinder the hiring and retention of those currently working in the field, including development of approaches for undoing gender biases.

Some research indicates that the child care workforce is almost entirely made up of women (98 percent) compared with other occupations (48 percent).¹³⁰ Early childhood education is a critical time for young children’s gender identity development, and the dearth of male teachers and caregivers may contribute to reinforcing stereotypical gender roles. While children in care see many different representations of femininity in their caregivers, they do not typically have the same opportunity to observe a spectrum of models of masculinity, which may limit their ideas of what it means to be a boy or a man.¹³¹

The Task Force recommends prioritizing investments in and advocating for the active recruitment of men entering the child care field through partnerships with early childhood education and child care programs and other community partners. Additionally, affinity groups or communities of practice could provide important support for male early learning and child care professionals. Partner with other funders to work toward equitable wages and support trainings and opportunities for development around approaches for undoing gender biases and perceptions, available to both child care professionals and families. Finally, the Task Force supports development of an improved data set that includes voluntary self-identified gender and ethnicity of the child care and early learning workforce.

Recommendation 9: Professional Development for New Child Care Providers

Provide professional development to providers in training and those who have recently entered the field, including community-based pathways to certification, communities of practice, and support to community and 4-year colleges and other training entities.

The Washington State Legislature passed HB 2556 in 2020,¹³² which requires the implementation of a noncredit-bearing, community-based training pathway for licensed child care providers to meet statutory professional development requirements and develop a plan to allow that community-based training to qualify for college credit.

Investments at a County, regional, or State level in creating and supporting aligned models of professional development for new providers will help to ensure equitable implementation of the

¹³⁰ National Association for the Education of Young Children (2019). *Building a Gender-Balanced Workforce: Supporting Male Teachers*. [\[LINK\]](#)

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² HB2556, Washington State Legislature (2019). [\[LINK\]](#)

integration of community-based and formal educational programs. Doing so would effectively address the barriers of accessing formal education for child care providers and caregivers who lack sufficient compensation or financial assistance to make the cost of continuing education a viable investment.

The foundational and systemic recommendations outlined above each address key challenges and opportunities to build a thriving and equitable child care and early learning system. Through a commitment to anti-racism, structures of accountability, equitable revenue sources, wages, and benefits, and community-driven professional development systems, the County can provide a critical leadership role alongside key partners to work toward this vision.

Programmatic Recommendations

The following recommendations include specific investments and new programs intended to increase access to child care, as well as strategies to engage with existing programs and systems. While partnership with other key agencies and stakeholders remains important to the overall success and health of the child care sector, this section focuses on recommendations primarily within King County's leadership domain. Recommendations could be implemented individually, and work toward the holistic health of the sector when combined.

10. *Comprehensive Child Care Program and Support for Providers*
11. *King County Child Care Subsidy Program*
12. *Supports for Informal Caregivers*
13. *Financial Incentives to Address Access*
14. *Inclusion-Driven Program for Children with Disabilities*
15. *Healing-Centered Practices to Address Trauma*
16. *Funding for Classrooms and Capacity Expansion*

Recommendation 10: Comprehensive Child Care Assistance Program and Support for Providers¹³³

Support efforts to centralize resources and support providers with training and education. Resources should be representative of provider identities and offer pathways for leadership, especially for BIPOC providers. Specific investments might include:

- **Shared Services Model** – *Support a collective shared services model¹³⁴ to leverage efficiencies of scale, possibly in conjunction with communities of practice. Shared services might include classroom supports or financial services that can more affordably be accessed through a common pool; a liaison to support employers in implementing strategies to support employees access in child care; and/or an information bank for providers to share resources with each other.*

¹³³ This recommendation addresses the requirement outlined in Motion 15521, lines 43-44: exploration of the potential creation of a King County child care assistance program.

¹³⁴ A Shared Services Alliance is a partnership of child care providers working together to share costs and deliver services in a streamlined and efficient way. The concept allows both center and family childcare providers, especially in low-income communities, to share some portion of the financial burden of operating a high-quality program. [\[LINK\]](#)

- **Healthcare Navigators** – Fund King County-specific Healthcare Navigators¹³⁵ in partnership with the Washington Health Benefit Exchange to support formal and informal King County child care providers as they seek to understand what insurance coverage is available for them to access.

The Task Force supports King County reinstating a Comprehensive Child Care Assistance Program, informed by the former King County Comprehensive Child Care Program.¹³⁶ This comprehensive program was, in fact, a system that could advocate on a county level. In addition to direct investment in a comprehensive program, the Task Force recommends that King County, in partnership with State agencies and child care professional organizations, support cross-system connections to additional resources for formal and informal child care providers to support their ability and capacity to respond to family needs. A Comprehensive Child Care Assistance Program could include additional holistic supports for providers, children and families, including those outlined in Recommendations #11-16. These supports could also stand on their own.

Recommendation 11: King County Child Care Subsidy Program¹³⁷

Reinstate a regional program to address unmet need,¹³⁸ re-envisioning equitable access by focusing supports on lower-income families in King County who are not eligible for or adequately served by other subsidy programs. These groups face increased barriers to accessing child care. A County-level program could be based on the regional cost of living and build on or mirror existing subsidies at State and local levels to fill gaps, prioritizing families with increased barriers:

- *King County families outside of the City of Seattle that mirror eligibility of the City’s subsidy program with a family income cap (currently between 201 percent and 350 percent FPL).¹³⁹*
- *Those who need support with co-payments for Working Connections Child Care above 137 percent FPL.*
- *Those who are in training/re-training programs or are college students (without limitations on program type).*
- *Those who are unemployed and seeking employment.*
- *Families who are undocumented.*
- *Families who are experiencing or are at risk of homelessness.*
- *Families who are facing other barriers to care and are unable to access other subsidy programs.*

Consider including licensed childcare providers and, through a pilot program, informal or FFN caregivers who meet health and safety requirements. The King County Child Care Subsidy Program could also house a voucher program for King County employees, as outlined in recommendation #18c.

¹³⁵ HB 2661; section 209, Washington State Legislature (2019). [\[LINK\]](#) A state bill establishing a navigator for child care providers did not pass, but a significant percentage of the sector is eligible for state health benefits. Given King County’s high cost of living, navigators could provide an important link for providers in accessing health insurance coverage not typically offered by employers.

¹³⁶ Motion 07204, Metropolitan King County Council (1988).

¹³⁷ This recommendation addresses the requirement outlined in Motion 15521, line 45: exploration of a voucher program for King County employees and residents.

¹³⁸ King County previously established a Comprehensive Child Care Assistance Program through Motion 07204, which included a subsidy for families that reflected regional costs of living.

¹³⁹ City of Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning. *Child Care & Preschool*. [\[LINK\]](#)

The Task Force recognizes that existing subsidy programs are deficit-based and rooted in the criminalization of poverty, and often perpetuate racist models and systems. Its recommendation to reinstate a child care subsidy program at King County accompanies a longer-term goal of reimagining child care at the County, State, and Federal levels to become a strengths-based model that meets the needs of all children, families, and providers and caregivers.

Recommendation 12: Supports for Informal Caregivers

Partner with trusted community organizations to provide easily accessible outreach and supports to Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) and informal caregivers. Resources should be determined by outreach directly to informal caregivers and available to those who are enrolled in subsidy programs and who operate outside of them. Examples of potential supports include workshops, home visits, materials, and supplies. Prioritize caregivers who experience systemic barriers due to race, income, home language, immigration status, or disability.

The majority of child care in the United States is provided by informal caregivers, and is often selected by families of color, immigrant and refugee families, families with children who have special needs, and families who earn less than \$100,000 per year.¹⁴⁰

FFN and informal caregivers provide critical solutions to filling significant gaps in the child care system; in fact, 82 percent of care during nontraditional hours is provided in this way.¹⁴¹ While limited data on informal care are available, a 2002 study found that most FFN caregivers are unpaid, and for those that are compensated, the hourly payment is approximately half that of licensed child care center and family child care providers. Two thirds of these crucial caregivers express a desire for more support.¹⁴² Providing community-based, trusted resources and building on existing efforts, including Kaleidoscope Play and Learn groups,¹⁴³ for these important caregivers will ensure high-quality, accessible care for more King County families.

Recommendation 13: Financial Incentives to Address Access

Offer financial incentives, including stipends or subsidy enhancements, property tax reductions or rental supports, or publicly-purchased child care slots to child care providers to address specific barriers to access, ensuring safety, and quality, including:

- *Infant and toddler care*
- *Care during nontraditional hours*
- *Inclusive care for children with higher needs, including developmental disabilities or delays, child welfare involvement, and those impacted by trauma.*
- *Explore strategies to include FFNs and informal caregivers as recipients of financial incentives*

¹⁴⁰ Northwest Women’s Law Center (2018). *Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care Facts and Figures*. [\[LINK\]](#)

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Brandon, R.N. et al. (2002). *Understanding Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care in Washington State: Developing Appropriate Training and Support*. [\[LINK\]](#)

¹⁴³ Child Care Resources. *Kaleidoscope Play and Learn*. [\[LINK\]](#)

Financial incentives can offset specific barriers child care providers face offering care for very young children, during nontraditional hours, or for children with higher needs, and increase access for King County families. King County may consider directly offering these incentives to providers and caregivers, and partnering with State agencies to advocate for statewide investment in similarly focused incentives.

Recommendation 14: Inclusion-Driven Program for Children with Disabilities

Implement a program with an emphasis on children who have a disability and are affected by additional discriminations, especially racism and child welfare involvement. This program should be directly informed by families and culturally-specific organizations.

- *Increase the pipeline of cross-discipline professionals/therapists/counselors, specifically individuals from BIPOC communities, immigrants, refugees, and people with disabilities, for children with a wide range of intellectual and learning disabilities and behavior needs and their parents/caregivers. Identify barriers to retention of those currently working in the field, and explore potential supports to remove these barriers and improve retention.*
- *Provide intensive, experiential (such as mindfulness skills) and ongoing training to caregivers and parents of young children to recognize and reduce unconscious influences of oppression of people with disabilities.*
- *Provide cultural /language navigators to assist families with access to systems and community resources.*
- *Move toward transformational systems that serve all children, rather than continuing the marginalization of children with disabilities.*

There is no research demonstrating any benefit to segregating or isolating children with disabilities. Rather, there is considerable evidence pointing to the benefits of inclusive care,¹⁴⁴ where children with disabilities and diverse cultural and racial backgrounds are included in early childhood programs, together with their peers without disabilities, facilitated by individualized accommodations and inclusive practices. About one out of eight children is eligible for Early Support for Infants and Toddlers, which provide developmental supports for children and their families,¹⁴⁵ and an estimated 15 percent of children in the United States old have at least one developmental delay that may require services, although fewer than 20 percent may receive them by age three.¹⁴⁶ Low-income families are about 50 percent more likely to have children with special needs than higher-income families.¹⁴⁷ Children with disabilities and special needs disproportionately use informal care arrangements, use care for fewer hours per week, and experience more child care instability. As a result, they may be disadvantaged by a subsidy system that focuses on center-based care, without consideration of informal caregivers.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Early Childhood Training and Technical Assistance System.

[\[LINK\]](#)

¹⁴⁵ King County Developmental Disabilities and Early Childhood Supports. *Early Support for Infants and Toddlers.*

[\[LINK\]](#)

¹⁴⁶ Vitrikas, K. et al. (2017). *Developmental Delay: When and How to Screen.* [\[LINK\]](#)

¹⁴⁷ Children's Defense Fund (2018). *Children with Disabilities and Other Special Needs: Opportunities to Participate in Quality Programs Must Be Expanded.* [\[LINK\]](#)

¹⁴⁸ Urban Institute (October 2018). *Insights on Access to Quality Child Care for Children with Disabilities and Special Needs.* [\[LINK\]](#)

Recommendation 15: Healing-Centered Practices¹⁴⁹ to Address Trauma

Invest in a model of holistic supports for children and families, with a coordinated entry point. This system would ensure a “no wrong door” structure for families, and connect them to the resources they need, including those that support healing from trauma and the promotion of infant, early childhood, and family mental health. The program should also include support for basic needs, without in itself being a source of trauma for families.

Healing-centered practice in licensed child care and FFN and informal caregiver settings includes:

- *Acknowledging and building upon, value, and validate the strengths and assets that children, families, and caregivers currently have;*
- *Mindfulness-based learning opportunities with an emphasis on self-compassion; embracing the discomfort of deeper conversations about race; and awareness to disrupt implicit biases;*
- *Professional development and community-based learning and practice opportunities to build mindfulness skills, which have the added potential as potent aids in decreasing bias.¹⁵⁰*
 - *Developing practices with champions from within BIPOC communities to find cultural congruence with community traditions;*
 - *Funding technical assistance/coaching/training/regular practice of mindfulness skills for caregivers /parents; and*
- *For BIPOC and immigrant and refugee families at risk of having children removed by child welfare, providing culturally appropriate parent coaching to try to avoid removal, and support families in navigating social service systems.*

Welfare and social services have long suffered from being siloed, making it challenging and sometimes impossible for families to access the resources they need. The trauma of enslavement, racism, poverty, exclusion and stigma attached to having a disability, and patriarchal systems continues to reverberate through generations, inflicting new trauma on children and in families. Research on the neural development of children and physical and mental harm caused points to the importance of mitigating trauma and investing in healing-centered strategies as an anti-racist approach.¹⁵¹

Recommendation 16: Funding for Classrooms and Capacity Expansion¹⁵²

Provide funding for new and current childcare providers to develop and supply their classrooms, as well as to expand capacity. This may include collaboration with the DCYF Early Achievers quality improvement program, and leverage future facilities investments through the Puget Sound Taxpayer Accountability Account (PSTAA) and the state’s Early Learning Facilities program,¹⁵³ as well as private and philanthropic resources. Explore strategies to include FFN and informal caregivers.

¹⁴⁹ Ginwright, S. (2018). *The Future of Healing: Shifting From Trauma Informed Care to Healing Centered Engagement*. [\[LINK\]](#)

¹⁵⁰ Torres, N. (2014) *Mindfulness Mitigates Biases You May Not Know You Have*. Harvard Business Review. [\[LINK\]](#)

¹⁵¹ Healing Centered Schools Working Group (2018). *Community Roadmap to Bring Healing-Centered Schools to the Bronx*. [\[LINK\]](#)

¹⁵² This recommendation addresses the requirement outlined in Motion 15521, lines 46-48: explore opportunities for increasing the number of available child care facilities, including in home care facilities, and employer partnerships related to those facilities.

¹⁵³ Washington State Department of Commerce’s Early Learning Facilities program supports Washington’s commitment of developing additional high quality early learning opportunities for children from low-income households. [\[LINK\]](#)

While PSTAA and the Early Learning Facilities program offer grants to maintain and expand access and improve quality, funding is limited to what can be considered facilities improvements. The Task Force provided feedback on and supported the proposed PSTAA Implementation Plan’s section on Early Learning Facilities, and recognized a need for funding to purchase equipment for classrooms, as well as resourcing for books and materials that help child care providers improve quality ratings and maintain the safety and wellbeing of children in care. Funding could be extended to augment PSTAA and Early Learning Facilities Fund grants, or provided to child care providers who are not seeking facilities investments but need resources to supply their programs. FFN and informal caregivers are frequently left out of funding for equipment and supplies, and should also be included in these efforts.

The programmatic recommendations outlined above provide opportunities to invest in and engage with new and existing programs at King County. They offer direct supports for families struggling to access and afford child care, licensed providers and informal caregivers in need of additional resources and supports, and children with disabilities and those who’ve been impacted by trauma who benefit from inclusive and healing-centered child care settings.

Immediate COVID-19 Relief for Providers and Planning for Future Emergencies

As outlined in the Current Conditions section, COVID-19 has taken a significant toll on the child care sector, and threatens its future stability. The recommendation below provides guidance for King County to consider in taking swift, comprehensive action to stabilize the field and ensure continued capacity. The Task Force also recognized the need for an opportunity to develop a model that could be quickly activated during future emergencies, including natural disasters or long-term school closures.

<p><i>17. Emergency Supports for Providers</i></p>
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Recommendation 17: Emergency Supports for Providers

In collaboration with other local, state and federal entities, provide incentives and resources to support basic financial needs of child care providers during current and future declared states of emergency, including the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery. Offer financial supports to providers whose businesses have closed but who will re-enter the field, as well as to members of the existing workforce who are stepping into leadership roles and have taken over businesses that otherwise would have closed permanently.

- *Consult providers directly about what kinds of supports are needed both short-term and long-term.*
- *Support to providers could include direct grants, as well as other creative tools like rent, tax, or utility abatements, a child care contingency plan, and health and safety supports, including cleaning supplies.*
- *Provide long-term and ongoing supports, not merely a one-time emergency response.*
- *Consistently maintain all financial supports to providers throughout declared emergencies.*
- *Engage in consistent and transparent communication and feedback loops directly with child care providers.*

While broad, long-term supports are needed to stabilize and sufficiently resource the child care sector, the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a significant toll that must be addressed to preserve even existing

levels of access. Shutdowns resulting from the pandemic could result in a permanent loss of as many of 4.5 million slots nationally.¹⁵⁴ A survey conducted by the National Association for Education of Young Children (NAEYC) indicated only 11 percent of programs expect to survive closures without financial support.¹⁵⁵

In response to the pandemic, King County quickly allocated \$2.2 million from PSTAA funds through Ordinance 19086¹⁵⁶ to launch an emergency child care program that provided free care to essential workers from April through June 2020. The program partnered with 55 existing child care providers to offer an enhanced reimbursement rate, low-barrier funding for additional costs, and a predictable revenue source. However, ongoing supports are needed. Access to high quality child care is essential to economic recovery in King County and Washington. An effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic could establish critical framework for future states of emergencies, including school closures and natural disasters.

Leadership and a Model for Regional Employers

King County is a major employer in the region and state, and has been recognized for its commitment to its employees. In 2019, King County was ranked 16th on the list of best employers in Washington by Forbes Magazine.¹⁵⁷ Key investments in employees to-date include generous compensation and benefits packages, paid parental leave, flexible telecommute policies, and an infants-at-work pilot program. The following recommendations build on the steps King County has already taken to better support employees who are parents or caregivers, and recognize the influence the County has in inspiring other employers to implement policies and practices to address child care access and affordability challenges.

18. Child Care Supports for Employees

19. On-Site or Near-Site Child Care

20. Engaging Regional Employers

Recommendation 18: Child Care Supports for King County Employees

Invest in strategies to increase access to and affordability of child care for King County employees, including:

- a. **Paid Parental Leave** – Equitably provide employer-supported paid parental leave to all King County employees, including:*
 - *Equitable access for term-limited temporary employees who may be ineligible due to term limitations*
 - *Equitable access to donated leave*

King County's pilot parental leave program began in 2016 and became an ongoing benefit in 2017. The program is available to nearly all leave-eligible employees who have been employed by King County for

¹⁵⁴ Jessen-Howard, S. and Workman, S. (2020). *Coronavirus Pandemic Could Lead to Permanent Loss of Nearly 4.5 Million Child Care Slots*. Center for American Progress. [\[LINK\]](#)

¹⁵⁵ National Association for the Education of Young Children (2020). [\[LINK\]](#)

¹⁵⁶ Ordinance 19086, Metropolitan King County Council (2020). [\[LINK\]](#)

¹⁵⁷ <https://kcemployees.com/2019/07/22/king-county-named-a-best-in-state-employer-for-2019/>

at least six months. The program’s uptake roughly reflects the gender breakdown in King County’s employment, with men making up approximately 60% of participants.¹⁵⁸ However, the program is not extended to term-limited temporary employees with fewer than six months remaining on their contracts. The program should be expanded to address this and other inequities and ensure support is available for all King County employees. The Task Force also recommends further exploration of inequities that may be present in the current King County donated leave program, and consideration of a pooled donated leave model like the one implemented in response to COVID-19.¹⁵⁹

b. *Supports for Employees with Infants*¹⁶⁰ – Provide a menu of options to support King County employees who are caring specifically for infants, including but not limited to:

- *Infants at work policy*
- *Child care vouchers*
- *Temporary job re-assignment*
- *Supportive and flexible telecommute policy*

The benefits of infants-at-work policies are significant, allowing for critical bonding time, lower child care costs during the most expensive and least accessible time for child care in a child’s life, and increased employee engagement.¹⁶¹ King County has piloted a program in the Department of Elections for parents and caregivers with infants between 6 weeks and 6 months. Parents must be in an office setting to be eligible, and those who do fieldwork or have contact with the public have not had access.

The Task Force recommends expanding the infants-at-work policy to all departments, complemented by a spectrum of supports available to employees with infants. By going beyond a traditional infants-at-work policy and complementing the program with child care vouchers, temporary reassignments, and flexible telecommute policies, King County could address inequities and provide a safety net of accessible supports to all employees with infants.

c. *Voucher Program* – Implement a King County child care voucher program.¹⁶²

King County and the King County Coalition of Unions¹⁶³ developed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2019 to convene a joint task force to study options for a possible child care benefit program, including the possibility of a multi-employer child care voucher program.¹⁶⁴ The County/Coalition of Unions task force assessment included an analysis of the need for child care by King County employees, affordability, quality, location of child care providers, and the administrative infrastructure needed to oversee the

¹⁵⁸ Source: King County Department of Human Resources.

¹⁵⁹ King County Emergency Leave Donation Fund. [\[LINK\]](#)

¹⁶⁰ This recommendation addresses the requirement outlined in Motion 15521, lines 49-51: identifying potential opportunities within County policies, such as telecommuting and the infants at work pilot program, to address the shortage of infant care.

¹⁶¹ In 2019, Washington State’s Child Care Collaborative Task Force recommended the infants-at-work model outlined by the Parenting in the Workplace Institute. [\[LINK\]](#)

¹⁶² This recommendation addresses the requirement outlined in Motion 15521, line 45: exploration of a voucher program for King County employees and residents.

¹⁶³ King County Coalition of Unions. [\[LINK\]](#)

¹⁶⁴ King County and King County Coalition of Unions (2019). *Memorandum of Understanding: Establishing a Child Care Benefit for King County Employees*. [\[LINK\]](#)

program, as well as an analysis of the costs and benefits of a child care benefit program and possible revenue sources. The Children and Families Strategy Task Force supports the implementation of a voucher program, guided by the recommendations of the County/Coalition of Unions task force.

- d. **Child Care Savings Accounts** – Support employer contributions to child care savings accounts to complement federal Dependent Care Expense Accounts.

As recommended by the Washington State Child Care Collaborative Task Force,¹⁶⁵ King County should create a program complementary to a Dependent Care Reimbursement Account (DCRA).¹⁶⁶ If determined by the state to be legally permissible, these accounts would allow King County to make complementary contributions to employee savings for child care, and would not count toward the \$5,000 annual DCRA limit. Partner with the state to explore potential tax incentives and benefits for other employers who contribute in this way, and ensure the program structure benefits families and does not duplicate or hinder the established DCRA.

- e. **Telecommute Policies** – Implement supportive telecommuting policies as they pertain to King County employees working with children at home, including but not limited to:
- Permanently extending allowance to telecommute while children are at home; and
 - Consider flexible schedules for employees who may have to provide child care during their normal work hours

Consider the unique challenges employees may experience when working with children at home and how these may intersect with other systems and policies. Among these may be increased food insecurity due to closed schools and child care sites, or additional risk and need for those living in intergenerational households. Explore what complementary and tailored resources may provide support to families who experience unique barriers and challenges.

Recommendation 19: On-Site or Near-Site Child Care¹⁶⁷

Invest in and incentivize on-site or near-site child care, including but not limited to:

- Exploration of opportunities to partner with existing child care sites and partners; and
- Incentives for affordable housing developers to include child care sites in their developments.

Nationally, about seven percent of companies offer on- or near-site child care. San Mateo County, California has one on-site child care provider and established relationships with two other community-based providers.¹⁶⁸ The United States General Services Administration (GSA) has a well-established on-site child care program. GSA manages the space, building services, and safety reviews, and community-based child care providers rent space and offer care.¹⁶⁹ King County could partner with child care sites

¹⁶⁵ Washington State Department of Commerce Child Care Collaborative Task Force (2019). *Recommendations Report to the Legislature under SHB 2367, Laws of 2018*. [\[LINK\]](#)

¹⁶⁶ A Dependent Care Reimbursement Account or Dependent Care FSA allows employees to set aside up to \$5,000 of their annual income pre-tax to pay for approved child care expenses.

¹⁶⁷ This recommendation addresses the requirement outlined in Motion 15521, lines 46-48: explore opportunities for increasing the number of available child care facilities, including in home care facilities, and employer partnerships related to those facilities.

¹⁶⁸ County of San Mateo Human Resources Department. *Child Care Options for County Employees*. [\[LINK\]](#)

¹⁶⁹ U.S. General Services Administration. *Child Care Services*. [\[LINK\]](#)

who offer care exclusively to King County employees, or those that are also eligible to the broader community but earmark a subset of slots for employees.

Patagonia, a large outdoor clothing and gear retailer, offers compelling evidence pointing to the benefits of on-site care. Its on-site child care services have been operating for 33 years. The company claims to recoup approximately 91 percent of costs through tax and other benefits, not including the intangible benefits of women in leadership, improved workplace culture, and employee loyalty. Adding in these intangibles, Patagonia estimates a 115 to 125 percent return-on-investment.¹⁷⁰ By providing affordable and accessible child care options to its employees, King County could see an increase in employee engagement while also reducing cost through potential tax benefits.

Recommendation 20: Engaging Regional Employers

Incentivize employers to take the above actions or develop a voluntary employer compact to take actions that support child care access for employees. Incorporate learnings from the Business Roundtable and partner with the business community to further engage regional employers as leaders in supporting child care access and affordability.

Although King County does not have authority to mandate employer supports for child care providers in incorporated areas, the Task Force supports the County in taking a leadership role in modeling investments in the wellbeing of its employees, and developing or building onto an existing voluntary compact, such as the 100% Talent Initiative.¹⁷¹ These compacts are a source of support and accountability, and give key business stakeholders the opportunity to share best practices, resources and information, and employers voluntarily agree to sign on and implement best practices.

Roundtable with Businesses and Other Stakeholders¹⁷²

A. Methodology for Roundtable Discussions

As part of Motion 15521 establishing the Children and Families Strategy Task Force, the task force was requested to “convene a roundtable with businesses and other identified stakeholders to raise awareness of the challenges King County employees, residents, and providers face in accessing and providing child care and identify policies at the state and local levels that might help address those issues.”

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, conducting an in-person roundtable within the timeframe of the Task Force’s work became impossible. Instead, this requirement was met through a series of virtual one-on-one conversations with key businesses, employers, and other stakeholders identified in partnership by the Executive office and DCHS staff. DCHS staff, a representative from the Executive office, and a subset

¹⁷⁰ Marcario, R. (2016). *Patagonia’s CEO Explains How To Make On-Site Child Care Pay For Itself*. [\[LINK\]](#)

¹⁷¹ Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Women’s Funding Alliance. *100% Talent: A Gender Equity Initiative for King County*. [\[LINK\]](#)

¹⁷² This section addresses the requirement outlined in Motion 15521, lines 52-58: The task force shall also convene a roundtable with businesses and other identified stakeholders to raise awareness of the challenges King County employees, residents, and providers face in accessing and providing child care and identify policies at the state and local levels that might help address those issues. An agenda and full notes from the employer roundtable discussions can be found in Appendix E.

of task force members conducted the conversations, which took place in August 2020. Through these conversations, the Task Force:

- Shared the work of the Children and Families Strategy Task Force, especially as it relates to employers and the business community;
- Raised awareness of King County work and policies to address child care access, and the challenges many King County employees, residents, and providers face in accessing care;
- Heard what local employers and stakeholders are doing to support child care, and what challenges they face in supporting their employees in this area; and
- Explored potential policies and solutions to support employee access to care and what supports employers might need in order to implement these.

King County conducted outreach and held virtual roundtable discussions with the following key employers and stakeholders:

Andrea Reay, President and CEO, Seattle Southside Chamber

Jasmine Donovan, President and CFO, Dick's Drive-In Restaurants

Kate Tylee Herz, Counsel, Davis Wright Tremaine (DWT)

Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner, Executive Director, CEO, and Co-Founder, MomsRising

Casey Osborn-Hinman, Senior Campaign Director, Workplace Justice, MomsRising

Markham McIntyre, Executive Vice President, Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce

Alicia Teel, Senior Vice President of External Relationships and Communications, Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce

MacKenzie Chase, Senior Policy Manager, Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce

Bobby Humes, Director of Human Resources, City of Seattle

Joe Fain, President and CEO, Bellevue Chamber of Commerce

B. Learnings from Roundtable Discussions

Across the board, employers who participated in roundtable discussions expressed a recognition of the need for child care access, and a desire to participate in developing solutions. There was consensus around several challenges: the high cost of care, scarcity of slots, and burdensome regulation of the field. Employers also cited several consistent supports to address employee needs, including generous leave packages, flexible scheduling, and partnerships with child care providers.

Key learnings are summarized below, and full notes from the employer roundtable discussions can be found in Appendix E:

- A major challenge with addressing the child care crisis is its complex nature. It is not binary (families do or do not have access), but includes many levers, like wages, cost, and quality. This has intensified with safety and access needs as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Employers recognized King County's leadership on similar issues for families, including paid family leave. They raised the philosophical question of the roles of the employer and government, and expressed a desire to collaborate to find solutions.
- Policymakers need to think of child care as a critical infrastructure, and dollars spent as investments.

- Heavy regulations are burdensome, both for providers and for employers who might want to develop child care partnerships. Employers expressed a desire for advocacy at the state and federal levels to secure incentives and remove unnecessary regulations.
 - In particular, employers cited insurance requirements for on-site child care or liabilities around infants-at-work as major barriers to implementing workplace supports.
- All employers recognized the benefit of supportive workplace policies, including paid leave, infants-at-work, and flexible work schedules. Several also recognized that workplace policies, including infants-at-work, aren't effective or appropriate for all employees, and stressed a need to provide options or menus that can meet employee need and address equity concerns for different types of jobs.
- Some employers are already implementing a number of voluntary policies and supports for employees who are parents or caregivers, including paid parental leave, subsidized child care, four-day workweeks, results-based scheduling, and telecommute options, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Employers expressed concern over the sustainability of flexible telecommute policies for employees who are both working and caring for their children.
- Employers expressed a strong preference for incentives over punitive measures, and recommended diverse approaches to fit different types of business and employee needs.
- Employers recommended further exploring space and facilities development, pools for benefits and supports, and other models that bring workers into emerging sectors.

Conclusion

The child care crisis, both nationally and regionally, has reached a boiling point. While disparities have long left child care providers underpaid and under-insured and families in need of significant supports in accessing care, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated these systems failures.

This report is the culmination of the dedicated and thoughtful work of the Children and Families Strategy Task Force, which brought together a unique and powerful group of experts, including parents, child care providers, elected officials, systems leaders, and advocates. The Task Force's work was guided by the King County value of racial justice. As a result, the recommendations in this report are grounded in a deep commitment to centering and valuing the experiences of those furthest from access and opportunity. This report's recommended interventions and policies particularly address the needs of BIPOC children, families, and child care providers, immigrants, refugees, undocumented families, families living homeless, and those with disabilities or special needs.

The recommendations have been grouped in four areas to present a spectrum of interventions and policies to pursue to reach an equitable and accessible child care system in King County. In order to move toward this vision holistically, the Task Force recommends County leadership in foundational systems change, investing in programmatic opportunities to support families and caregivers, providing relief to stabilize the sector during the COVID-19 pandemic and future emergencies, and demonstrating a regional model for employer leadership in addressing child care access.

The crisis of child care access and recommended responses that the Task Force has described in this report are also dynamic. The full impacts of COVID-19 and the concurrent crisis of racism are not yet

fully known. In this context, an ongoing commitment to learning, adjustment, accountability to community, and investment will be critical to achieving equitable and accessible child care for all King County families. It will be necessary to secure financial support and partnership from other governmental agencies and funders to build and maintain a sustainable child care sector. The recommendations outlined in this report provide strategies for King County to lead on increasing equitable child care access and affordability. Although efforts to broaden access to child care and early learning have failed to meet the growing need experienced by families, King County now has the opportunity to build upon its existing work through Best Starts for Kids, PSTAA, and other investments in children, youth, and families. By demonstrating bold leadership, the County can mobilize Federal, State, and local partners as well as private funders in working collaboratively toward a healthy, equitable, and thriving child care system for all.

Appendices

Appendix A: Motion 15521

Title

A MOTION establishing a King County children and families strategy task force to explore policy recommendations related to child care affordability and access in King County

Body

WHEREAS, in 2017, the King County women's advisory board adopted the topic of improving child care access and affordability in King County identifying lack of access to child care as a stark problem that not only affects King County's families, but also its employers and economy, and

WHEREAS, King County has been a leader in partnering with families to ensure babies, children and their families are healthy, thriving and able to establish a strong foundation for life, and

WHEREAS, the Washington state legislature has established the Washington Child Care Collaborative Task Force to develop policies and recommendations to incentivize employer-supported child care and improve child care access and affordability for employees and King County will be a nonvoting member of the Washington State Child Care Collaborative task force to better inform our policies, and

WHEREAS, King County has an institutional commitment to advancing equity and social justice for county employees and the residents who call this place home. With that, there are racial inequities in access to quality child care that meets the cultural and linguistic needs of our residents and enables parents to work. At the same time, child care workers are disproportionately people of color and are often paid low wages, and

WHEREAS, under the leadership of Executive Dow Constantine, King County developed and implemented the best starts for kids levy that was approved by King County voters in 2015. Best starts for kids is considered the most comprehensive approach to child development in the nation. Best starts for kids invests an average of \$65 million per year to support King County families and children so that babies are born healthy, children thrive and young people grow into happy, healthy adults, and

WHEREAS, SEIU Local 925 has been a leader in advancing the dialogue with state and local governments concerning health care affordability, maintaining an adequate supply of licensed providers and facilities, and ensuring worker protections for child care professionals, and

WHEREAS, the King County Coalition of Unions and the county executed a Memorandum of Agreement in Total Compensation bargaining for 2019-20 to study and issue recommendations by December 31, 2019, regarding implementing a child care voucher program for King County employees;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT MOVED by the Council of King County:

A. The executive shall establish a King County children and families strategy task force, to be appointed by the Executive and approved by the County Council by October 25, 2019, in order to prepare a report that makes recommendations for addressing access and affordability issues related to child care in King County. The Executive shall also establish a staff working group to prepare for and assist the task force, including lead staff from the Executive's office. The task force's analysis shall include, but not be limited to, potential creation of a King County child care assistance program, including, but not limited to:

- a. a voucher program for King County employees and residents;
- b. opportunities for increasing the number of available child care facilities, including in home care facilities, and employer partnerships related to those facilities; and
- c. identifying potential opportunities within county policies, such as telecommuting and the infants at work pilot program, to address the shortage of infant care.

2. The task force shall also convene a roundtable with businesses and other identified stakeholders to raise awareness of the challenges King County employees, residents, and providers face in accessing and providing child care and identify policies at the state and local levels that might help address those issues. The task force should consider consulting with members of the public, King County employees, members of the King County Women’s Advisory Board, and experts on early learning and child care access and affordability as it works to develop recommendations. The task force shall provide a report to the executive and the King County council with its recommendations by September 30, 2020, at which point the task force shall expire. The report to the council shall be filed in the form of a paper original and an electronic copy with the clerk of the council, who shall retain the original and provide an electronic copy to all councilmembers.

B. The task force shall include, but not be limited to, one representative from the following:

1. An organization representing the interests of licensed child care centers;
2. An organization representing the interests of licensed in-home child care providers;
3. An organization providing childcare services as a family, friend, and/or neighbor child care provider in King County;
4. An organization or individual representing parents who utilize child care on a regular basis;
5. An organization representing the interests of philanthropy;
6. An organization representing the interests of labor;
7. An organization providing child care services in rural or unincorporated King County;
8. An organization providing multicultural, bilingual curriculum in either the preschool care program setting or the after-school care program setting, or both, in King County
9. An organization representing the interests of immigrant or refugee communities in King County;
10. A nonprofit organization providing training and professional development for family child care providers and family, friend and neighbor child care providers in King County;
11. An organization representing the needs of children with developmental delays or disabilities;
12. A representative from the King County best starts for kids team in the department of community and human services or the department of public health;
13. An advocacy organization representing parents, early learning, foster care youth and expanded learning opportunity interests in King County;
14. An organization whose mission is to stem the level of child care expulsions in King County;
15. The King County department of human resources;
16. The King County women's advisory board;
17. The Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning;
18. The King County office of the executive; and
19. The King County council.

Appendix B: List of Children and Families Strategy Task Force Members

Children and Families Strategy Task Force Member Full Name	Affiliation	Motion Requirement
Bilan Aden	African Community Housing and Development	A representative of an organization providing multicultural, bilingual curriculum in either the preschool care program setting or the after-school care program setting, or both, in King County
Calli Knight	Office of King County Executive Dow Constantine	A representative from the King County Office of the Executive
Dr. Debra Sullivan	Black Child Development Institute	A representative of an advocacy organization representing parents, early learning, foster care youth and expanded learning opportunity interests in King County
Denise Pruitt	King County Department of Human Resources	A representative of the King County Department of Human Resources
Genevieve Stokes	Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF)	Ex-officio
James Madden	Enterprise Community Partners	Ex-officio
John Bancroft	Family, Friend, and Neighbor Caregiver	A representative of an organization providing childcare services as a family, friend, and or neighbor child care provider in King County
Juanita Salinas-Aguila	Enterprise Community Partners	Ex-officio
Karen Hart	SEIU 925	A representative of an organization representing the interests of labor
Kathleen Brasch	Women’s Advisory Board	A representative from the King County Women's Advisory Board
Laura Kneedler	Northwest Center	A representative of an organization representing the needs of children with developmental delays or disabilities
Lauren Vlas	Office of Councilmember Jeanne Kohl-Welles	A representative from the King County council
Leilani Dela Cruz	City of Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning (DEEL)	A representative from the Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning
Lois Martin	Community Day Center for Children	A representative of an organization representing the interests of licensed child care centers
Lucia Lopez	Home Visitor/Parent	A representative of an organization or individual representing parents who utilize child care on a regular basis
Maki Park	Consultant/MomsRising	A representative of an organization or individual representing parents who utilize child care on a regular basis
Miriam Zmiewski-Angelova	United Indians of All Tribes	A representative of an organization providing multicultural, bilingual curriculum in either the preschool care program setting or the after-school care program setting, or both, in King County

Nancy Ashley	Heliotrope	A representative of an advocacy organization representing parents, early learning, foster care youth and expanded learning opportunity interests in King County
Natalie Lente	Child Care Resources	A representative of an organization whose mission is to stem the level of child care expulsions in King County
Nela Cumming	Encompass	A representative of an organization providing child care services in rural or unincorporated King County
Omana Imani	School's Out Washington	A representative of an advocacy organization representing parents, early learning, foster care youth and expanded learning opportunity interests in King County
Patti Bailey	Panda Care Center	A representative of an organization representing the interests of licensed in home child care providers
Paula Steinke	SOAR	A representative of an advocacy organization representing parents, early learning, foster care youth and expanded learning opportunity interests in King County
Ruth Kagi	Children's Champion Consulting	A representative of an organization representing the interests of philanthropy
Ryan Quiglar	Renton Innovation Zone Partnership	A representative of an organization providing child care services in rural or unincorporated King County
Sarah Reyneveld	Women's Advisory Board	A representative from the King County women's advisory board
Susan Yang	Denise Louie Education Center	A representative of an organization providing multicultural, bilingual curriculum in either the preschool care program setting or the after-school care program setting, or both, in King County
Tania Hino	North Seattle College/Parent	A representative of an organization or individual representing parents who utilize child care on a regular basis
Theresa Lenear	Goddard College	A representative of a nonprofit organization providing training and professional development for family child care providers and family, friend and neighbor child care providers in King County
Ti'esh Harper	City Year Seattle/Parent	A representative of an organization or individual representing parents who utilize child care on a regular basis
Wendy Harris	King County Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS)	A representative from the King County Best Starts for Kids team in the Department of Community and Human Services or the Department of Public Health
Zamzam Mohamed	Voices of Tomorrow	A representative of an organization representing the interests of immigrant or refugee communities in King County

Appendix C: Task Force Meeting Schedule and Topics

Month	Topic/Action	Subcommittee Report-Out
December	Kickoff Meeting	
January	Meeting 1: January 15 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider recommendations from state Child Care Collaborative Task Force report Discuss subcommittees 	<i>No subcommittee report-outs</i>
	Meeting 2: January 29 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centering racial equity in child care access and affordability 	
February	The landscape of systems and policy solutions	<i>No subcommittee report-outs</i>
	<i>All subcommittees meet</i>	
March	The cost of care in King County	<i>All subcommittees provide brief report-outs</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost of Care
	<i>All subcommittees meet</i>	
April	Quality, equitable, and inclusive care in King County	<i>All subcommittees provide brief report-outs</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> High Quality, Anti-Racist, and Equitable Care Inclusive Care and Supports
	<i>All subcommittees meet</i> <i>Task Force reviews and provides feedback on PSTAA Implementation Plan</i>	
May	Child care workforce in King County	<i>All subcommittees provide brief report-outs</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workforce and Compensation Report-out follow-ups, if needed
	<i>All subcommittees meet</i>	
June	Employers' role in child care solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HR Policies and Employer Best Practices <i>Report-out follow ups, if needed</i>
	<i>All subcommittees meet</i> <i>Racial equity analysis of recommendations</i> <i>Chairs meet to coordinate and align recommendations</i>	
July 8 <i>Full-day virtual retreat</i>	Confirm recommendations and priorities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retreat to prioritize and finalize recommendations 	
July 16	Final vote on recommendations	
August - September	Report finalized <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft report September 30: report transmitted to Council 	

Appendix D: High Quality, Anti-Racist, Equitable Care Subcommittee Anti-Racist Framework and Vision – Full Planning Notes

Vision

The environment is reflective of the children served where they are visible, valued, and validated (CE)

	Diversity What is it? Representation of BIPOC folks within system How does it support anti-racist, high quality care?	Radical Belonging What is it? Valuing, honoring, holding space for difference, conflict, and repair How does it support anti-racist, high quality care?	Inclusion What is it? Decision-making power, spending of resources, crafting of narratives How does it support anti-racist, high quality care?	Equity What is it? Systems built with targeted universalism How does it support anti-racist, high quality care?
Students/ Families	- Representation of BIPOC in learning content (CE) - Representation of BIPOC providers, role models, etc. (CE)	- Naming and identifying systems of oppression and their impacts on BIPOC folks in all of their intersections - Belief in the ability and desire for all students to learn. - Students are engaged in the learning environment -Integration of anti-racism and student/family culture in learning environment and organizational processes and systems -Communication, transparency, accountability -Accounts for the impacts of systems of oppression and trauma	-Student voice and choice -Families are partners (influencers and decision-makers in the care of their children) - Collective leadership at childcare facilities (and other cultural ways of leadership) -Transparency at child care facilities	-Accountability -Access -Process -Cost of care
Providers	- Representation of BIPOC folks in leadership roles and anti-racist principles and policies (PE)	anti-racist principles -Accounts for the impacts of systems of oppression and trauma	- Collective leadership <i>at the County (systems that license, supervise, support child care providers)</i> (and other cultural ways of leadership) -Transparency <i>at the County (systems that license, supervise, support child care providers)</i>	-Anti-racist professional development -Pay and healthcare

Inequity shows up as whiteness, patriarchy, and capitalism and manifests in these problematic ways:

Diversity	Mindset/approach/skills/experience engagement	Mindset/approach/skills/experience learning	Access	Inclusion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of representation of BIPOC in learning content (CE) • Lack of representation of BIPOC providers, role models, etc. (CE) • Lack of representation of BIPOC folks in leadership roles and anti-racist principles policies (PE) • Culturally specific providers not being valued or seen as leaders (PE) • Lack of spaces for community with other providers (PE) • Leadership is very 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges with student engagement in general when you think about discrimination against youth in schools. BIPOC students are disproportionately impacted when it comes to voice, choice, and discipline (CE) • Belief in the ability and desire for all students to learn. BIPOC are not believed to have this ability and desire and so suffer in the amount and quality of care (CE) • Lack of environments that can name and understand the ways that BIPOC children are impacted by racism, classism, etc. Students end up learning these systems of oppression. When they're not being named and challenged a lot of shame and confusion for young people (CE) • Societal and individual/familial trauma (CE) • Providers lacking internal capacity to prioritize family engagement and support for families in navigating ed system, etc. (FE) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of communication and transparency with day to day learning and experiences of their children (FE) • Families not seen as "partners" that should be helping to shape the environment/experience (FE) • Educators: professional development truly speaks to early childhood education reflective of and seen through the diverse cultural lenses (PE) • Being reflective practitioners in identifying own areas of strength and areas for growth is serving diverse children and families (PE) • Under supported – lack of access to applicable education, breaks, coaching, real time support, navigating city, state, county systems (PE) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to learning resources and opportunities (CE) • Limited supports available which impacts engagement: lacking transportation, food, basic needs (CE) • Lack of access to avenues to be heard as well as accountability for concerns with their children (FE) • No real process or space to take concerns when they are not met by their providers (FE) • Cost of child care (FE) • Need for wraparound resources for families (FE) • FFN care sometimes viewed by dominant culture as “low quality” even though for many families it is preferred type of care – desire for care is high because families trust FFN caregivers more than placing child in public setting (PE) • Underpaid (PE) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The environment is reflective of the children served where they are visible, valued, and validated (CE) • Environments that don’t center youth voice/choice (CE) • Lack of opportunities to be involved in their children's learning (FE) • Families truly being partners with those providing care and education for their children (FE) • Lack of support with informing families about general development and learning of their children – related to communication with families, not a need of families (FE) • Lack of bringing parents along in the experience of their child so that they can be a resource for providers (FE) • Societal and individual/familial trauma (CE) • Societal and individual/familial trauma (FE) • Need for wraparound resources for families (FE) • FFN care sometimes viewed by dominant culture as “low quality” even though for many families it is preferred type of care – desire for care is high because families trust FFN caregivers more than placing child in public setting (PE)

<p>eurocentrically designed leaving no room for collective leadership or other cultural ways of leadership (PE)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families not seen as "partners" that should be helping to shape the environment/experience (FE) • Lack of respect of cultural and parent/guardian knowledge (FE) • Societal and individual/familial trauma (FE) • Tone policing of families (FE) • Being reflective practitioners in identifying own areas of strength and areas for growth is serving diverse children and families (PE) • Societal and individual/familial trauma and secondhand trauma (PE) • Underpaid (PE) • Under supported – lack of access to applicable education, breaks, coaching, real time support, navigating city, state, county systems (PE) • Legal restrictions that don't hold complexity of work, role (PE) • Something in general about the intersection of legality, compliance, and being able to serve the many diverse needs of BIPOC families, including trauma, special needs ... and more (PE) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not enough supports around professional development, diverse educational opportunities (PE) • Degree in most cases trumps work experience that reflects quality, inclusiveness, that are responsive to culture and language (PE) • Lack of spaces for community with other providers (PE) • Stringent educational requirements which don't always matter for providers or align with the work; therefore creating barriers (PE) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No/limited health benefits (PE) • Legal restrictions that don't hold complexity of work, role (PE) • Something in general about the intersection of legality, compliance, and being able to serve the many diverse needs of BIPOC families, including trauma, special needs ... and more (PE) • Lack of avenues for change – giving feedback, making recommendations ...holding folks accountable (PE) • Lack of support on the accounting, taxes side of the business (PE) • Lack of spaces for community with other providers (PE) • Stringent educational requirements which don't always matter for providers or align with the work; therefore creating barriers (PE) • Leadership is very eurocentrically designed leaving no room for collective leadership or other cultural ways of leadership (PE) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Societal and individual/familial trauma and secondhand trauma (PE) • No/limited health benefits (PE) • There is a pecking order to the professional field depending on the role played and values are placed upon each of their worth in the field. (PE) • Legal restrictions that don't hold complexity of work, role (PE) • Something in general about the intersection of legality, compliance, and being able to serve the many diverse needs of BIPOC families, including trauma, special needs ... and more (PE) • Lack of avenues for change – giving feedback, making recommendations ...holding folks accountable (PE) • Lack of spaces for community with other providers (PE) • Stringent educational requirements which don't always matter for providers or align with the work; therefore creating barriers (PE) • Leadership is very eurocentrically designed leaving no room for collective leadership or other cultural ways of leadership (PE)
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The impacts of these manifestations are on stakeholders are:

(How can we use data already at the County to tell a different story? What impacts are not represented in County data that needs to be gathered? What's important to hold while telling this story?)

Holding these manifestations of white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism in early learning/childcare, these are our priorities:

Child Priorities	Family Priorities	Provider Priorities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family choice, racial, ethnic and cultural diversity – the child has a right to be in an environment that makes sense to the child • Every child has the right to be visible, valued and validated – including deciding to place children with caregivers who look like they, understand their identity and supported and encouraged who they are • Importance of stability in work force for children (overlap) • Every child has the right to have their strengths highlighted <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ For ex. in supporting trauma-informed care we have maybe lost the asset-based language for children ▪ Going straight to deficits means the child lives in those deficits • Impacts of isms: patriarchy, age-ism, etc. – how do we make space for children to bring their own personal experience/strengths • Engagement (over deficit-based language of discipline) • Children have a right to be taught social-emotional development and learning by adults who have engaged in their own learning – <i>this makes me think about the support needed for the sector around equitable care and racial justice in general</i> • Children need for their families to not be stressed – including finding and maintaining child care – i.e. supporting families wrap-around needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for community to be involved in the decision making • All families have a right to choose the kind of learning environment they want for their child • Right to easy access to hold folks accountable – and appropriate avenues to do so • Easy, low-barrier access to high quality care • Supports around transportation, food, and other basic needs • Right to be included in their child’s learning – be in partnership with their children’s learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • living wage/wage increase and health care benefits, • loosening educational requirements to make it a viable career path for folks AND should not limit access to increased education opportunities for those who want it (no either/or professional development) – i.e. more equitable, realistic and pragmatic educational requirements (and not lowering quality), • impact on leadership and hierarchy in lieu of collective leadership – how do we promote horizontal/collective leadership styles in <u>decision making</u>, building community among providers so the workforce can impact the system • Recommendations around FFN and equitable resources for FFN caregivers– <i>need to clarify who we are talking about when we say FFN?</i> Everyone who is caring for children (impact on BIPOC and family choice as well) • What would it look like for the general public to know what quality caregiving looks like, resources, training and education, etc. • Tax forms and implications for financial support around all forms of FFN

*Want to make sure that our conversation around public perception is represented in initial priorities.

Holding targeted universalism:

- When we say Targeted Universalism – who/what are we talking about?
 - *Folks furthest away from “high quality” child care, i.e. the child care that everyone deserves, particularly **Individuals at the intersection of the below experiences (i.e. intersectionality)***
 - BIPOC
 - Black/brown males
 - Native and Indigenous folks
 - Low-income
 - Do we want to prioritize certain poverty-line indicators?
 - *Those using subsidies*
 - Folks who live in child care deserts
 - Families experiencing homelessness*
 - Unhoused
 - THP or emergency housing
 - Shared housing that is not sustainable
 - *Especially folks who then need to look for child care in multiple locations*
 - For ex: migrant workers/families*, individuals co-parenting
 - Single parents:
 - particularly young single parents
 - Young single parents who are working or in school
 - Families with evening/overnight/weekend/“non-traditional hours” needs
 - immigrants and refugees
 - Recently immigrated folks
 - Undocumented folks
 - Folks with limited-English skills or whose primary language is not English
 - Folks who only speak an Indigenous language
 - Families and students with accessibility needs, including:
 - chronic illness
 - Low-income families who have children with special needs
 - Families and caregivers who are students
 - ***explicit eligibility for state subsidies – but still experience barriers**
 - There are places that don’t take subsidies or limit it

- Criteria for accessing these supports are full of barriers for families (for ex \$0.25/hour too much to qualify, or move to a new zip code)
- *Are these benefits underutilized or hard to access?*
- County borders/address boundaries that “implicate” families or require families to pay back subsidy programs
- Issue is often that we aren’t considering intersectionality – filling little holes for distinct identities rather than a holistic response to multiple-intersecting identities
- What considerations should we be holding? – particularly around things like citizenship/immigration status, socioeconomic status, etc.
- Building out anti-racist and equity work in the context of these recommendations
- What is the impact on the different stakeholders – children, families, caregivers

Recommendations:

- The County should only pursue progressive recovery measures and revenue that doesn’t put the burden on the same people we should be centering – while centering child care
- Eligibility and access:
 - “Un-complexify” access to subsidy programs
 - “What is available, accessible AND acceptable?” (from disability justice community)
- All of this hinges on holding **intersectionality at the center**
 - Eligibility and access – for ex. young single families experiencing homelessness
- Centering communities of color in economic recovery and other recommendations – “are these helping us get to that goal?”

Vision

We envision a thriving early learning ecosystem that centers children, families, and providers and supports their emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual health. Policies and practices of the early learning system are explicitly anti-racist. The system links to resources and other sectors to offer a network of wraparound supports that truly hold the child, family, and community in support of every child's healthy development, beginning prenatally. Ample funding, over the long-term, is available to support all aspects of the system, and related systems that support basic needs, mental health (for children, families, and providers), and early intervention. Children and families who were formerly furthest away from accessing high-quality child care are now well-served regardless of where they live.

Children experience early childhood educators and environments as warm and welcoming. They feel seen as individuals, acknowledged as having limitless potential, and valued as members of their classroom, family, culture, and community. Their innate creativity and sense of wonder is nurtured. Children see teachers of all genders who look and talk like them. Children's cultures are represented authentically in classrooms and centers through design, curricula, food, language spoken, and family engagement. When used, child assessments are culturally and age appropriate.

Families experience the system through interactions with providers and other staff who are respectful of their backgrounds, cultures, values, languages, and traditions. They are supported by the system to choose the type of care best suited to their family structure and beliefs, and their child's temperament and needs. Care during non-standard hours is available and accessible. Care settings that reflect their own race, ethnicity, culture and home language are widely available. Families are engaged as true partners in their children's learning, growth and development, and are perceived as the experts on their children. They are viewed as essential partners in their children's early development. Like their children, families feel valuable, visible and validated by all their interactions with teachers, staff, referral agencies, and others.

Providers are well compensated through salary and comprehensive benefits. They experience this system as supportive of their professionalism, encouraging of their continued academic and professional development, and respectful of their contribution to the community. Providers have leadership opportunities; representatives of the provider community sit at tables where decisions on policy and funding are being made – and their voices are heard and honored. Providers gain skills and knowledge through classes, trainings, mentorship, peer groups, and hands-on experiences. Anti-racist and anti-bias education is foundational for all providers, and is tailored to their cultural or ethnic background.

Providers are supported through all levels of their education to gain deep knowledge of child development, including infant and early childhood mental health. Their education includes development of robust, effective family engagement practices, and understanding of the essential role families play in supporting healthy, happy children. Providers have easy access to community resources that can support families' needs. Pathways for providers to advance professionally into the K-12 system and beyond are available, accessible, and sustained over time.

Appendix E: Employer Roundtable Agenda and Notes from Discussion

Children and Families Strategy Task Force Employer Roundtable Agenda and Notes

Attendees

Andrea Reay, President and CEO, Seattle Southside Chamber

Jasmine Donovan, President and CFO, Dick's Drive-In Restaurants

Kate Tylee Herz, Counsel, Davis Wright Tremaine (DWT)

Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner, Executive Director, CEO, and Co-Founder, MomsRising

Casey Osborn-Hinman, Senior Campaign Director, Workplace Justice, MomsRising

Markham McIntyre, Executive Vice President, Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce

Alicia Teel, Senior Vice President of External Relationships and Communications, Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce

MacKenzie Chase, Senior Policy Manager, Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce

Bobby Humes, Director of Human Resources, City of Seattle

Joe Fain, President and CEO, Bellevue Chamber of Commerce

Juanita Salinas-Aguila, Community Enterprise Partners, Children and Families Strategy Task Force

Laura Kneidler, Northwest Center, Children and Families Strategy Task Force

Tania Hino, North Seattle College, Children and Families Strategy Task Force

Nancy Ashley, Heliotrope, Children and Families Strategy Task Force

Ruth Kagi, Children's Champion Consulting, Children and Families Strategy Task Force

Calli Knight, Office of King County Executive Dow Constantine, Children and Families Strategy Task Force

Jessica Tollenaar Cafferty, Child Care Policy Lead, King County

Task Force recommendations

- *Share one-page overview of Task Force work and recommendations*
- *Share goals of virtual roundtable conversations*

A crisis in King County: framing the context

- *Share data on child care access, affordability, workforce, and other challenges in King County*

MomsRising: Challenge with child care is that it's not binary (you do/don't have access), but complex and multi-faceted, many different components including cost and wages. Many intersections with other policies, including family leave. Provides an opportunity to reframe so many of the issues we've known to be challenges for caregivers. One thing getting traction is defining child care not as an industry, but as critical infrastructure that we need, like roads. It's possible that will get us closer to infrastructure funds. For example, if you're going to have construction, you need to pay for child care. You can't have any other industry or field without child care.

- *Share King County policies and work to support child care access to date*

Dick's Drive-In: We're not talking enough about why child care is so expensive, and why there's such an imbalance in supply and demand. As we look for solutions, let's explore more deeply why the cost was so high even pre-COVID. The high cost of care is a symptom of the problem, and we've seen it before. When the cost reaches the cost of a mortgage, then women stay home.

[Equitable, Accessible Child Care in King County: Recommendations from the Children and Families Strategy Task Force](#)

Seattle Southside Chamber of Commerce: We've seen a huge cost of overhead for centers. There are new and different types of regulation, insurance and liability costs, and when someone wants to open a business and provide child care to employees the costs are outside of a reasonable scope to take on. The cost of employees leaving the workforce is also exorbitant, but liability and legal issues have prevented employers from investing in on-site child care. Could we better advocate at a federal level to support entrepreneurship and opportunities for employers to offer child care without putting their business at risk?

The employer's role

- *What has your organization done so far to address child care challenges and access for your employees? What have you heard of other employers doing?*

Dick's Drive-In: We have a scholarship program for our employees that expanded to support child care in the 1990s, when we had a similar labor market to pre-COVID. This year we increased the amount to \$28,000 over four years, specifically to benefit those who are using it for child care for kids up to age 13. Employees can use it for licensed child care, or to pay someone they know to watch their kids (not a spouse). Employees have to pay income taxes on this benefit over \$5,000, and it would be interesting to advocate at the Federal level for this to be exempt. We tailor benefits to the changing needs of employees; for example, offering flexible working schedules. School going virtual makes it clear that child care needs don't end when kids go to school. Even in normal times, this is an issue with early release days and summers, and that's been highlighting this. Workforce flexibility is great, but it doesn't work for everyone, and it's not a sustainable solution for those who can telecommute. Being a fulltime parent, educator, employee, and child care provider isn't sustainable. It will result in many parents leaving the workforce, especially mothers. We're viewing child care providers as essential workers, but not teachers, and we're paying them half as much and charging parents.

Seattle Southside Chamber of Commerce: Home-based child care is a major source of care in South King County, so we created a roundtable where they can interface with other home-based providers and have peer supports. Our membership can also contact us if they have concerns or need help. The top concerns of our members over the past four years have been education, workforce development, and early childhood education/child care issues, with employees dropping off due to child care issues. It would be helpful if there was consistency and a toolkit or checklist we could provide businesses and employees. Will COVID push us to think about true transformative change? It's hard and government agencies will need to think outside of the boxes they usually fill. We need to have real, honest conversations about what we can do to better support families and businesses.

DWT: It's interesting hearing about menu of options to support employees' child care needs. We recognize that a law firm will have a much different workforce than King County. Pre-COVID, we offered paid parental leave, and equity issues within it. Generally attorneys had more leave than staff, and were covered by different policies. We now offer 15 weeks paid for attorneys. We also implemented a ramp-up process upon returning from leave, but with full pay, and justified it looking at the inability to retain women. We also created a parental mentorship program that is now being rolled out firm-wide. A partner helps you with delegating work as you transition out, and provides support as you transition back in. The second piece of this program is peer mentorship: being a sounding board, helping them with their career progression to ensure they're not getting "mommy tracked" and set back by having taken leave. Partners even check in, stop by to bring food, and provide supports during leave.

Aside from parental leave, we offer two full weeks of subsidized emergency care for Bright Horizons or with a nanny at home. Going into September, an internal task force is looking at supports for families. We're surveying to understand who is responsible for dependents (newborn to elder-care) and what supports might be useful, including stipends to support internet costs, care expenses, etc. These could be used to hire a neighbor or parent to watch kids. We're also offering flexible work arrangements during the week, which could include the weekend or reduced hour arrangements, as well as supplemental education services, additional EAP services, and unpaid leaves of absence.

Other employers are looking at creative ways to provide the state's leave and offer supplemental benefits on top of that, including additional wage reimbursement. We haven't seen employers take a proactive measure on supporting pregnant parents in figuring out child care.

MomsRising: We employ over 40 people across the country, and work virtually with no office. We try to work based on results rather than tracking when people are at their desks. We're paying based off of key performance metrics, which gives people control over schedule and flow of work. We're very welcoming of bringing your child of any age to work with you, but employees decide on their own how they work best. Our policy is modeled after Results-Only, but is not as intensive. We also work in a team environment purposefully so we can pass the baton as people come in and out, knowing and expecting that people have different schedules. We try to model the expectation that family is first.

We've been closed during the pandemic every Friday after an analysis of our workforce. Employees were concerned that rolling 8 hours off instead of a set day would accidentally push support staff to work the full seven days. This was an analysis point that was really important. We have plentiful paid leave, and have helped to pass and adopt pandemic paid leave. Example: As an employee, I'm working a 2-day a week schedule, not necessarily 8 hours straight because of child care. Having Fridays off as a company gives me more time. So it's not just the availability of emergency supports, but also ongoing supports we know are important, including paid leave for mental health.

For people that have concerns about productivity when you take this kind of approach, we are one of the highest functioning, impact-producing organizations at the national level, and we hear this over and over again. So lots of time off does not equate not getting work done. In an analysis of who's getting most constituent contacts during pandemic, MomsRising is one of the top, and when we look at who's garnering the most attention in press, MomsRising is one of these as well. We recently had members on the front page of NYT. This is not an ineffective way to work. In fact, I think we're more effective because we try to empower our team to work when it works best for them.

Seattle Chamber: Our workforce gets younger every year. Over the last decade, we implemented and expanded a paid parental leave program, and work to dovetail with the state paid parental leave program to give maximum benefit and choice to employees. As an employer, this is the most cost-intensive thing that we've done. Less formally we focus on sharing of information, flexible work schedules, and understanding of child care needs, making that part of the culture so there's not a stigma. Our infants in the workplace policy has been under-utilized, but it's a well-developed policy, and the state's CCCTF looked at Chamber's model. With COVID, we're accelerating telecommute options, and have become more understanding about working with children at home.

Other larger employers often think about on-site: Bright Horizons has lots of partnerships. One barrier folks people may find is facilitating the connection between a child care facility in a building. How might

we offer grants or a zero-interest loan to convert spaces? One frustration for employer and parents is that the child care system is really fragmented. Space requirements for outdoors have also been difficult, as well as the cost equation: how much is employer subsidizing the cost vs. where does that money come from, and what's reasonable? There's no clear standardized cost. Employers have to consider what the outcome will be if they invest, and could use guidance here.

There's also a philosophical question: how much of this is the employer's cost to bear (e.g. paid family leave), and how do you set up a system that injects money into the system but makes sense in the long haul? There are responsible employers who invest in their employees all the time, but child care is the single biggest liability if they wanted to offer it on-site. So employers need a significant reduction of barriers, or some kind of incentive, otherwise they'll keep offering gym memberships and sending people back to school. The remote workforce may change child care needs as families look closer to home. It may change the need for on-site care.

Two employers to consider talking more with are Costco, which set up a partnership with Bellevue College to offer a sliding scale child care option, and Sweitzer Engineering, who could share their experience setting up on-site child care for their employees, which was really onerous and complicated.

City of Seattle: Paid parental leave, state programs, robust leave offerings. City Council considered infants at work policy – our strategy was to use KC's initial pilot review for a feasibility study. In response to COVID: Let people go home, flexible hours. Meeting to explore partnering with Rethink Benefits, and their platform to offer wraparound supports for kids and parents. It would be an add-on to EAP. Hopefully that platform is engaging, and a reasonable price-point at 75 cents per employee.

Bellevue Chamber: Even more progressive companies don't know how to provide a solution. Most significant effort is providing extra money to cover cost. The problem is a mix of capacity and health and no one has an answer on either. People don't want to send their kids back to care, but can't work effectively with them at home.

- *Have your employees shared specific child care needs or barriers?*

DWT: Retention of women in the workforce has been the challenge. In general, our workforce is highly compensated people who can afford child care, but there's still a lack of access: even if you can afford it, you can't find infant slots, so parents just don't return to work. It's putting women and especially women of color in a position where they have to opt out of the workforce. COVID provides us the opportunity to take a critical look at the child care sector. It is forcing employers to be creative, collaborative, and think about how they are going to retain working parents. A lot of the stigma around being a working parent has been erased during COVID, as you see kids come in and out of calls.

City of Seattle: We just completed a survey about employee needs more broadly, but it showed a need for parenting and education support.

Bellevue Chamber: The primary issue is around elementary aged kids (K-5). For the most part, early childhood or Pre-K options are back open, so if parents had it before and are comfortable using it now, those facilities are available. Parents are angry, and frustrated with schools not opening, but being asked to pay more for less, not knowing how to do what's best for their kids, and feeling guilty by school districts. There's concern that the cost-benefit analysis of policy choices we've made around public

schooling will have greater negative long-term impacts than immediate risks of the pandemic. Losing employees has less of an impact right now with financial equations of COVID, and we're not hearing of folks dropping out of workforce yet broadly. It still feels like disruption, not the "new normal." So people are staying in limbo.

- *Have you considered implementing other programs, policies, or solutions?*

MomsRising: We regularly check in with our team to see if our policies are meeting their needs. We like to think of ourselves as constantly evolving, especially in unpredictable times.

City of Seattle: Right now we're going to overcommunicate, lift up our policies that we need to look at differently. Our policies allow for the space and grace parents need, we need to empower people to do that. We're implementing a comprehensive communications plan, and want to make sure people access benefits they already have.

Bellevue Chamber: A number of parents are moving to group model, not relying on school district or child care providers, but creating pods that are supported by parents. A lot of them want school districts to provide vouchers for solutions that will work.

- *What challenges have you faced in supporting your employees to address child care challenges?*

Dick's Drive-In: Child care assistance doesn't cover the full cost of care, and people need to be able to find child care. It's even worse with COVID and there's a lack of flexibility. People will need to rely on relatives, and determine how safe that is. High cost, low availability.

Seattle Southside Chamber of Commerce: We would like to partner with task force on communication. There are members in community who would like to participate or serve if there was a structure to support child care providers with business planning, etc.

MomsRising: Insurance can often be a hurdle to providing child care because of liability issues. When we think about the importance of equity and linguistically and culturally relevant care, without infrastructure from government, it's really challenging for employers to be supportive of the type of care that various employees want to take advantage of. For example, many workers would prefer an FFN caregiver or family child care home. While a workplace might provide on-site care, it might disproportionately benefit a certain population of their workers, and the impacts on equity and opportunity can be big. The more that we can invest in and rely on government structures and infrastructure to make a sustainable solution for employers to feed into, the better.

DWT: There are huge barriers around licensing requirements for child care. With schools closed, there should be child care on site: it feels safe to have my kid at work with my coworkers' kids. There are systemic barriers for people who want to operate child care, or employers who might be willing to set some up, and the consequence is people going off the grid. It would help if regulators make it easier for people who want to invest their time and abilities to caring for kids.

City of Seattle: Liability could be an issue with an infants-at-work policy. Child care wasn't a primary focus pre-COVID. In fact, it was counter to some of the work we're doing to attract women and especially women of color to our skilled trades. If we have office workers bring their kids to work and

aren't offering that to folks in skilled trades that's an issue. I love a menu. Wherever we can offer different resources so people can meet their needs best, that echoes and meets employees where they're at and supports them more holistically. If one item creates disparities for BIPOC employees, another might create a different impact. Also speaks to employees who have multiple kids.

Bellevue Chamber: Space. We've been advocating for Amazon to have a net zero child care policy in Bellevue, where they'd provide no fewer than 100% of the demand they add to the system as they move people into Bellevue. They've been pretty receptive as they start to realize it's for their own employees. It would include covering costs, setting aside physical space to accommodate that. That's a longer-term issue because they won't be physically occupying the space for some time. For vast majority of employers, that's so far out of their capacity and expertise that it's not doable. Multi-employer co-ops don't even get off the drawing boards because of complexity.

Exploring potential solutions

- *What would help you address the challenges you've faced so you could better support employees in accessing child care that meets their needs?*

DWT: More collaboration is really needed, being able to tie into an employer network to understand how we can solve this problem. I see employers thinking through how they can support employees during COVID-19. We'll need to recognize we have a deeply broken system with incredible disparities, and have ongoing dialogue and collaboration between the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Make it affordable and accessible for everyone so they don't have stress and end up opting out of the workforce.

Seattle Southside Chamber: Support around business planning and setting up systems would be helpful. I think we could increase the number of slots because we could increase the number of businesses providing that work. Remove barriers for child care providers who want to expand (education, resource sharing).

Dick's Drive-In: There are lots of child care providers who are business-savvy, but regulations make it unfeasible to expand. What if we had great child care providers every couple of blocks? Regulations now essentially require teachers need to get degrees. How do we help providers offer more great care rather than making them jump through hoops and spend money? The level of regulations will result in these providers leaving workforce, rather than getting a degree. The impetus is higher quality but you'll create more cost, fewer slots, and it's impractical. Parents need to know their kids are safe, but in the name of that goal we are squashing entrepreneurs who would create quality child care that we all want.

City of Seattle: Look at how the private sector thinks about amenities. Example: when onboarding new employees, giving offerings of child cares that we have relationships with, maybe offer a discount. Maybe willing to pay more for single parents, so they can pay less. Something like this builds economies of scale, as the office helps get child care providers set up with paperwork and requirements. If we know there's a shortage, how do we create the incentive for people to buy into the work? Take out guesswork, and give people the exclusive nature of a great benefit and child care access. Revenue is another issue; there's no way around this. We can be more creative when we have more money. How do we think about caring for the whole parent, what wraparound services do they need? Match

preferred providers who've been vetted, know what folks get paid, and offer wraparound services to meet needs where they're at. Very compelling as a recruitment paradigm.

Bellevue Chamber: The most helpful thing right now would be to take hypocrisy out of public education divide. Either be consistent: this is a danger, or it's not. Then allow public schools to get creative and adapt, we saw private schools turn on a dime. Expectations have created insignificant incentive for them, and public schools need to step up for that K-5 population in a way we haven't seen.

- *What role do you see the County, state, or local municipalities playing in supporting employers in this area?*

DWT: Kudos to Washington and King County on PFL; the US is super far behind on this issue. I'm really happy with what I've seen at a County/State level for filling some of the federal gaps. Two things could be helpful, First how can we as a community subsidize child care for people who are in lower-income jobs, and offer accessibility for people who really truly need it and can't afford it? Affordability and access are intertwined. Second, it's important to explore what barriers we've put in place that are making it hard to provide child care in a meaningful way – why is there that decrease in the number of providers? There's so much wealth in Puget Sound/King County region. Maybe there could be an incentive for big employers to take this on as their duty. Maybe the big companies haven't provided internal way to offer care for employees, so high income earners take available community-based spots.

MomsRising: Providing a model not just for other local employers but also for the state can be really valuable. We saw this with paid leave, paid sick days: local municipalities really helped lead the way in advancing progressive policies, and provided case studies to use at the state level. The more the County can invest resources and grow infrastructure in child care, the more other systems will follow your lead. Coordinating with other government agencies can be really helpful. The County is a few steps ahead in terms of centering racial equity and digging deep on what that looks like in early learning. King County could do a lot in terms of public education, like launching an ongoing business roundtable for outreach and support. We want big change and massive investments, and also other models could be nationalized (e.g. the Military model), but it takes a massive investment our country hasn't been ready to do yet. A large part of the reason we're in this patchwork situation is we've failed to invest in infrastructure of child care for decades. Can we have a realistic look at revenue? As we're looking at things like defunding policing, can we reinvest those revenues in communities that are most impacted in ways that might include education and early learning?

Seattle Chamber: Employers need a clear understanding of philosophical approach that the County is taking, so they know what's expected in this conversation. Facilities and space is a major issue. Consider purchasing new or existing County-owned properties and facilitate expansion of space that can be used for child care. Put out resources and guides for employers who are interested in providing care on-site or partnering with existing providers. Revenue and regulations are a concern, and it can be very difficult to remain in compliance. Avoid standing up new systems that have additional regulations or requirements on already over-burdened employers. With the philosophical approach, the business community is very diverse. How things work for small businesses may look very different than for larger businesses. Our members would much prefer something that is an incentive rather than punitive. It may require different incentives and timelines, and setting one standard for what folks offer would be really difficult. A stair-stepping approach works a lot better with members. Right now, you can ring the alarm bell. This is a crisis that people are not talking about. We're already 10-20 years behind, we need to do it

right now. Developing big political will to move big things, and sharing the data on how serious this is, and how much worse it's getting, is so helpful to us for advocacy.

City of Seattle: Identifying systemic barriers, and being creative enough to remove them. If there's a shortage, what's our 10-year horizon for kiddos, and do we have infrastructure to support the industry? What's going to compel me to move to the City? Focus on the infrastructure, and create incentives if there's a shortage. Employer Security Dept has a great model for emerging and needed sectors: move folks into another emerging industry. Scaffold skillsets for people to enter this field, cohort people to start changing that offering and give them incentives.

Bellevue Chamber: Could the County support getting multi-employer child care co-ops off the ground? There's an equity question, and when governments are asked to participate, there's concern around whether that will inhibit the process. The County or Department of Commerce having subject matter expertise and a leadership role as a convener could be helpful.

- *If you could think of any solution with no limitations that would help your employees meet their child care needs, what would that look like?*

DWT: A four-day work week – evidence supports that this can actually lead to more productivity and it offers more flexibility for people to spend time with their kids. The solution isn't just to provide more child care, it's also to give parents more time with their kids. Having gender equity in parenting too: erasing the stigma on birth parents being able to take children, especially male non-birth parents. There's huge stigma attached to men taking leave or picking up the slack.

Dick's Drive-In: You have the business community's attention. The things we need no matter what are those that are deemed essential: we need food, we need medical care, we need child care – the teacher's role in child care is being ignored and we're going to pay somebody else under the dome of child care. Facilities is a major issue, we'll see a lot of empty storefronts. Could we work together as business, landlords, government to start up child care in these empty spaces? COVID will facilitate the death of many in-person businesses. How can we work together to create more spaces for people to go into work when that resumes? Encouraging supply is one of the most important things the County can do. Support a pool for benefits, like a business health chest, etc. Large child care groups can purchase for employees, create other pooling for smaller child care providers.

Seattle Southside Chamber: Be proactive, not reactive. Don't wait for business community to say this doesn't work, we should be part of the conversation while you're developing the regulations. We are very much engaged in this work and aware of it, we know there's an economic impact, and we want to be part of finding solutions.

MomsRising: Cost relief for parents: a lot of supports have been directed insufficiently toward providers without actually addressing needs of families except for very low-income families, so thinking about policies that might offer some relief to families through reduced copays, increased eligibilities, making sure more families have access to some kind of subsidy would be helpful. And really digging in to learn more about FFN care. So many children are in this type of care and it's a huge resource and asset to communities, yet we know very little about the needs. Not that we should institutionalize it, but that we should resource it so families can afford to provide that care if that's their choice. Maybe learn more and do some pilot projects with FFN caregivers.

Seattle Chamber: A lot of employers care about child care and are starting at it from very different perspectives depending on size of business, age of employees, what policies they already have. It's a growing issue. This is not an ancillary add-on, it's critical to the success of businesses in our region. It hasn't been hard to find people to talk about it. The most common thing is them feeling pretty stuck about it. Even those making big moves are facing significant challenges, and unsure if it's the right choice. Innovative solutions, like incentivizing the development to include child care facilities because space is such a huge pinch point could be revolutionary, but we're doing it at the tail end of a development cycle so we're missing a lot of opportunity. On-site partnerships, where an employer actively seeks a partner to provide high-quality child care and helps to subsidize the cost isn't revolutionary but seems to be the best set-up we have right now. In the last five years this has risen to top of mind for employers especially as a recruitment issue. We've also seen outreach that provides a subsidy for night nurses so new parents can get rest. For smaller businesses, a model to provide health care subsidies might be useful to consider for child care. For some of our members that's been a good way they're able to provide a benefit to their employees when the cost is too high. Talk directly with the business community: different businesses, different sizes, different geographies to understand the complexity of their challenges. It will take longer for small businesses to get up to speed than someone who's more well-resourced, and we don't want to make it so they can't attract the talent they need because they can't offer what better-resourced companies can. AWB is really interested in this, and the US Chamber Foundation had powerful research on need and impact on employers for gaps in child care around the country.

Even if someone figures it out, the needs are so different in different places. Legislators like Rep. Tana Senn, Sen. Claire Wilson are really working on these issues. It would be interesting to look at a model like housing connectors, who matchmake people experiencing homelessness get into housing units. It helps break down stigma around homelessness, and targets those who have the least. We care deeply about child care personally and professionally. We want to be engaged, and would like to be engaged early. We want to do more. Stressing the importance of rebuilding the economy in a way that is more equitable and inclusive. Disproportionately child care impacts have fallen on women and people of color.

City of Seattle: If you're committing your life to public sector, there are sharp folks who could be elsewhere. Should we not reward those employees with school to education opportunity pipelines? For example, if you're a government employee, you get an extra stipend for your kids to care and feed them, since you're giving of yourself to your community. That would be a taxpayer paradigm shift, and we'd need to tell the story differently. Some of our most diverse employees are lowest paid. So this would be a way to raise all boats by paying a living wage and giving employees what they need to make sure their kids are rising as they rise. Think about how much social safety net we wouldn't have to pay for if we invested in these things. This needs to be looked at as an investment – we purposefully use that language. If we can't see it as an investment, we shouldn't be doing it.

Bellevue Chamber: Every commercial property that was developed would have space set aside, there'd be incentives to go into child care sufficient to meet demand, and an expectation that we'd expect K-5 classrooms to be back, spread out, leaving room for older kids to tele-learn. All of those courses K-12 would be virtual so families could decide what's best for them without losing access to pedagogical information. School districts not doing that would have their dollars shifted to direct child care subsidies.

In terms of revenue, there's concern about greater government involvement. A system that doesn't put parents at center of purchasing decision for their child can't succeed. The business community will be most likely to support revenue decisions if they feel decision making power is in the hands of parents. Could explore matching funds for capital contributions. E.g., if a provider wanted to access grant funding, they would pay staff at a certain threshold. The harder we make it for providers to operate, the fewer slots we'll have. So has to be a light touch.