

2021

COWLITZ COUNTY CHILD CARE ACCESS REPORT

Summary and Survey Results

A project of the Cowlitz Community Charter and Cowlitz Community Network





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"Access to quality and affordable child care greatly impacts our family. There is no way both my husband and I could work outside the home without child care."

Colleen, Parent at Rose Valley Child Care



Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the member organizations of the Cowlitz Community Charter and our project partners for their contributions including survey collection, report preparation, family engagement, public outreach, and advocacy efforts. These collaborative efforts provided for robust family and community input, which is critical to the development of plans to address our local child care crisis.

Cowlitz Community Charter

Project Partners

Child Care Aware of Washington

Children's Discovery Museum

Community House on Broadway

Highlands Neighborhood Association

Kelso Christian Academy

Kelso School District

Lil' Red Barn Academy

Little Christian Day Care

Longview Public Schools

Love Overwhelming

Lower Columbia College Head Start/ECEAP/EHS

Lower Columbia Community Action Program

Lower Columbia School Gardens

Montessori Children's House

Pollv's Davcare

Progress Center

Wee Care Daycare

Youth and Family Link

Funders

Washington State Department of Commerce

Child Care Partnership Grant

Seattle Foundation

Safe Start Fund for a Healthy Economic Transition and Recovery

Introduction

Access to quality, affordable child care is critical for the success of our children and the health of our economy.

The Cowlitz Community Charter was established through a consensus-based community process and is hosted by the Cowlitz Community Network. The Charter brings together a majority of health and social service agencies who have established a common agenda to increase collaboration across sectors to achieve shared goals. In 2020, the Charter declared issues regarding child care a critical priority and identified the need to spread awareness about local child care gaps and the effects that ripple outward across the system.

The Cowlitz Community Network sought funding and was awarded a Child Care Partnership Grant from the Washington State Department of Commerce and matching funds from the Seattle Foundation to develop an action plan to stabilize and expand child care capacity in Cowlitz County. The purpose of the Child Care Access Report is to provide our community with the information needed to identify and implement strategies to improve existing capacity and expand access to child care for local families.

More than 700 Cowlitz County families were surveyed, including parents and guardians of children enrolled in local school districts, child care centers, social services, parenting, support, and after school programs. School districts were instrumental in survey collection efforts and a diverse network of community partners gathered responses from the families they serve.

Methodology and Sources

Methodology

The Cowlitz Community Network partnered with a wide network of community organizations to conduct a survey of Cowlitz County families to better understand their needs, access, and ability to pay for child care. The survey was based on previous questionnaires conducted in Cowlitz County and feedback from members of the Child Care Access Report Work Group. Collection was conducted online, distributed in print, and during in-person interviews. Distribution of the survey began on February 15, 2021 ended on May 7, 2021, and 773 responses were submitted. Survey respondents were not required to complete all questions and families were asked to complete only one survey per household.

Sources

Child Care Aware of Washington

FRED Economic Data

United States Census Bureau

Washington Department of Children, Youth & Families

Washington Department of Social and Health Services

Washington KIDS Count

Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

Washington State Employment Security Department

Regional Reports

Washington State Department of Commerce

Child Care Collaborative Task Force Report

Child Care Aware of Washington

Child Care in Cowlitz County

Washington STEM and Washington Communities for Children

State of the Children Early Learning and Care: Southwest Washington

Workforce Southwest Washington

The Business Case for Child Care

One Page Overview

Cowlitz County Child Care Access Report



A Project of the Cowlitz Community Charter

The Child Care Partnership Grant brought together community organizations, school districts, and child care providers to survey more than 770 Cowlitz County families about their access to child care.

Of the families surveyed,

Need care for Infants



Toddlers

24% Preschool Age Children



Elementary Schoo Age Children

Children older than 5th Grade



Licensed child care doesn't fully cover community demand

- 12,893 children under the age of 10 in the County
- **1,582** total licensed child care slots
- 197 licensed child care slots open in May of 2021
- 58% of survey respondents said that they could not, or can only sometimes, meet their family's child care needs.





Informal child care is the majority of child care in our community

of survey respondents use family, friends, neighbors, or other unlicensed child care providers



of the families using informal child care rely on it three or more days per week

Child care is an economic concern for families

The average annual cost of care for one child is about 17% of the median household income for Cowlitz County

73% of survey respondents said the cost of child care was a significant factor in what type of child care they chose

46% said they have turned down economic opportunities (stopped working or attending school, reduced hours, etc.)

due to the cost of child care

> 42% said they currently or previously received financial assistance with child care

For those that have received financial assistance, 32% turned down a promotion, salary increase, or other job opportunity to avoid losing their child care benefit

Families with specific needs have a harder time accessing child care

21% of survey respondents have children with one or more specific need (medical, behavioral, developmental, communication, other)

Families with specific needs are more likely:

- · To have unmet child care needs
- To be excluded from child care options
- To use informal child care, and rely on it for more days each week
- To have searched for child care in the last year, and spent more time searching

Parents and guardians of children with a behavioral health or developmental need are more likely to educe their work hours or stop attending school

Summary

Families with Children

There are over 28,000 children in Cowlitz County households and 45.5% are under the age of ten. Access to child care is a specific concern for working families as 62% of people with children under the age of six, and 70% of people with children age 6-17, are in households where all parents are working. The median family income is \$68,419 and parents in the county can expect to spend up to 24% of their income towards child care, depending on the ages and number of children. Many Cowlitz County families qualify for state subsidies and there are 2,898 local clients participating in the Working Connections Child Care program. Families surveyed were of varying demographics and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Child Care Needs

Most survey respondents have one to three children with child care needs and less than 5% of families surveyed need child care for more than three children. More families need care for elementary school age children than other ages, which could be attributed to the large number of responses from school district families. Among the respondents with a child care need, 5.9% need care for infants, 17.1% for toddlers, 24.4% for preschool age, 45% for elementary age and 7.7% for children older than 5th grade.

Child Care Access

Not all families in Cowlitz County are able to access child care when they need it and when comparing survey data to the County's population of child care aged children, it is possible that 2,000 local children may not have access. 17% of survey respondents said that child care is needed, but not available to them.

Most child care in our community is informal and 58% of survey respondents use family, friends, neighbors, or other unlicensed child care providers for some or all their child care needs. Of those families that use informal child care, 58% rely on it three or more days per week. Eighteen survey respondents added "before and after school programs" as another preferred child care choice in the survey question comment box.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, licensed child care capacity in Cowlitz County had been increasing, up from 1,817 total slots in 2014 to 2,338 slots in 2020. According to a June 2020 survey of child care providers by Child Care Aware of Washington, there were 47 total licensed child care providers in the County and 13 were reporting temporary closure due to the pandemic. A May 2021 survey by the same agency reported 44 total licensed providers and six with temporary closures. Only four providers in the County are available 24 hours a day and they rarely have open slots.

Families with specific needs have a harder time accessing child care, are more likely to have unmet child care needs, and are more likely to be excluded from child care programs. 21% of responding families reported that their children have specific communication, behavioral health, or medical needs; and more than 50 local families have been told that a child in their family might be a better fit in another child care setting or had been expelled from a child care program. These families use informal child care more often and rely on it more days per week. They are more likely to have

searched for child care in the past year and spend more time than other families to find it. Parents and guardians of children with specific child care needs are also more likely to reduce their working hours or stop attending school due to a lack of access to child care.

Of the survey respondents that did not have child care during the days and times that they need it, 14.8% need early morning options, 43.4% need care during regular business hours, 19% need care in the evening, 6.7% need overnight options and 11.1% need care on weekends. Searching for child care was described as "Difficult" or "Somewhat Difficult" by 61% of survey respondents and most families responding said that they ask trusted people for advice when choosing new providers.

Child Care Experience

Fewer families said that they would prefer to use family, friends, neighbors, or other unlicensed providers than those that currently use that type of informal care. When asked to choose all child care types that they would prefer to support their family's needs, survey respondents ranked their preferences as 1) Child Care Centers, 2) Pre-School / Early Learning Programs, 3) Unlicensed/Informal, 4) In-Home Child Care, and 5) Other. When asked to choose the top three qualities they look for in a child care provider, survey respondents overwhelmingly ranked health, safety, and security as a top priority, followed by life skills and social/emotional learning, and opportunities for active and outdoor play.

Cost of Child Care

Child care is a significant financial burden for local families. 66% of survey respondents said the cost of child care was a significant factor in what type of care they selected and 42% said they had turned down economic opportunities (stopped working or attending school, reduced hours, etc.) due to the cost of child care. Only 39% said they have in the past, or currently receive financial assistance with child care and for those that have received financial assistance, 18% turned down a promotion, salary increase, or other job opportunity to avoid losing their child care benefit.

A Cowlitz County family can expect to pay a median cost of 11-24% of the county's median income for child care. The average annual cost of licensed care for one child is \$9,288 and licensed infant care can cost a local family up to \$910 per month. In comparison the average annual cost to attend Lower Columbia College is \$7,226 and Workforce Southwest Washington reported in December 2020 that local employers pay at least \$3.2 million in costs associated with employees that have unmet child care needs.

Transportation

Most survey respondents live within 20 minutes of their child care provider and travel 20 minutes or less to their workplace, college, or regular destination. For families that said they must coordinate with someone outside of their household to arrange pick up or drop off for child care, 7.6% do so every day that they need care, 6.2% coordinate 5-6 days per week, 22.7% coordinate 3-4 days per week, and 51.9% coordinate 1-2 days per week. Most families said that they do not currently have difficulty with transportation, but for those that do, coordinating with others was the number one cause of difficulty.

Community Impact

Gaps in the local child care system impact the whole community. The cost of child care and the limited availability of high-quality licensed child care can slow economic growth for households with young children, burden families considering having children, reduce the influx of families with young children moving to our community, and limit the pool of applicants seeking local jobs. Without accessible and affordable child care options, local families may have to choose between spending more each month, using less preferred types of care, cutting back on work or school hours, or making lower-quality arrangements for their children.

Population Data

Cowlitz County

Cowlitz County Population		110,593
Households with one or more people under age 18		12,613
Children in households		28,406
Children under age 10		12,893
Married couples w/own children		6,801
Cohabitating households w/own children		1,190
Female householders w/own children		1,960
Male householders w/own children		714
Single-parent households with children as a % of households with	children	36.2%
Race and Ethnicity		
American Indian or Alaska Native	2.1%	2,323
Asian	1.6%	1.770
Black or African American	1.1%	1,217
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.4%	442
White	91.1%	100,750
Two or more races	3.7%	4,092
Hispanic or Latino	9.3%	10,285
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	83.2%	92,013
Median Household Income		\$54,506
Median Family Income		\$68,419
TANF and State Family Assistance (clients)		3,932
Working Connections Child Care (clients)		2,898
% Unemployment Rate		7%
% of children under age 18 living in poverty		17.6%
% of children under age 6 with all parents working	60	0.5 - 65.3%
People over 16 in the labor force w/own children age under 6		7,214
where all parents in family are in the labor force (62.3%)		4,493
People over 16 in the labor force w/own children age 6-17		15,384
where all parents in family are in the labor force (70.2%)		10,796
Accessed Manufally Franciscos Las Falsacifica and Complete of Hall allian	A 05 l .l l	,
Average Monthly Earnings by Education and Gender of Jobholder, Education	Ages 25 and older Female	Male
Less than High School	\$3,009	\$4,664
High School Only	\$3,295	\$5,337
Some College/ AA Degree	\$3,791	\$5,803
Bachelor's degree +	\$4,760	\$7,117
N/A	\$1,863	\$2,743
Education Attainment () of negation and ().	Januara and bioban	47.00/

Bachelor's degree and higher

High school graduate and higher

17.0%

89.3%

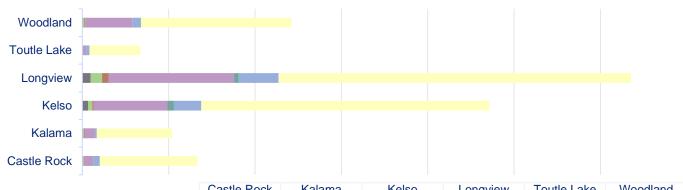
Education Attainment % of persons age 25+

Monthly Cost of Child Care

Median Cost	Infant	Toddler	Preschool	School Age
Child Care Center	\$910.00	\$823.00	\$678.00	\$440.00
Family Child Care (In-Home)	\$758.00	\$758.00	\$683.00	\$531.00
State Child Care Subsidy Rate				
Monthly Rate	Infant	Toddler	Preschool	School Age
Child Care Center	\$1,005.00	\$884.00	\$770.00	\$607.00
Family Child Care (In-Home)	\$735.00	\$735.00	\$616.00	\$561.00

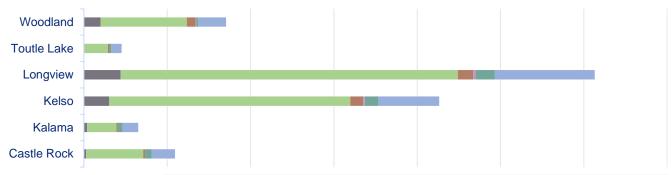
Cowlitz County School District Enrollment

Enrollment by Student Demographics



	Castle Rock	Kalama	Kelso	Longview	Toutle Lake	Woodland
■ American Indian/Alaska Native	7	10	66	97	5	8
■Asian	10	8	50	132	2	16
■ Black/African American	1	11	15	74	2	11
■ Hispanic/Latino of any race	105	116	856	1455	36	544
■ Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	4	6	73	54	1	0
■Two or more races	76	16	318	460	37	100
White	1130	872	3338	4083	589	1740

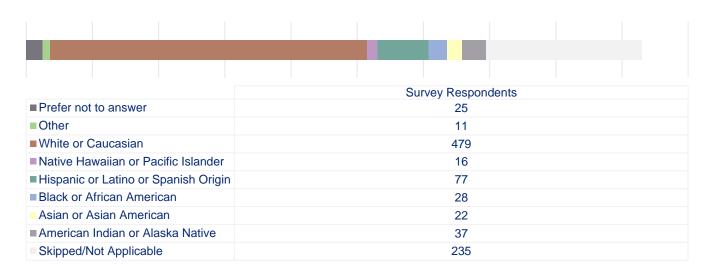
Student Enrollment by Program and Characteristic



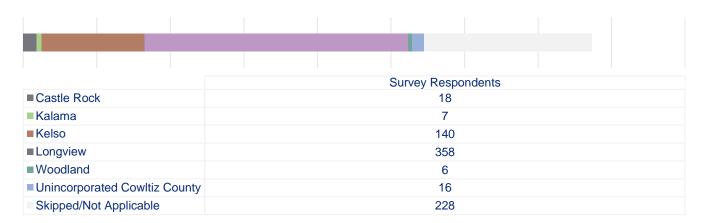
	Castle Rock	Kalama	Kelso	Longview	Toutle Lake	Woodland
■ English Language Learner	26	40	304	441	0	199
■Low Income	685	351	2893	4045	288	1037
■Homeless	24	13	153	186	18	105
■Migrant	0	0	21	33	0	7
■ Section 504	80	63	163	227	24	25
■ Students with Disabilities	279	186	729	1199	123	333

Survey Responses

How do members of your family identify? (please check all that apply)



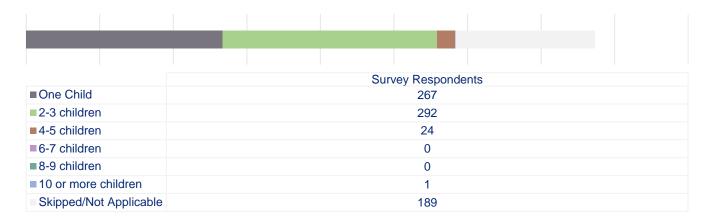
Where in Cowlitz County does your family live?



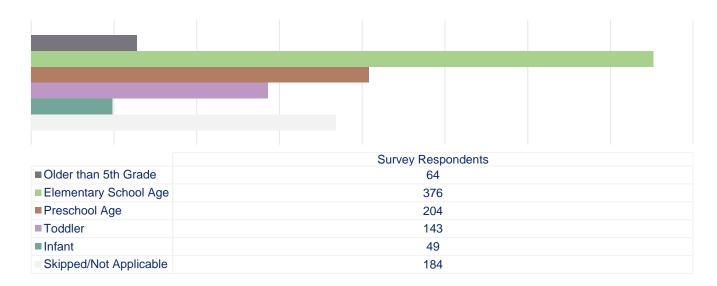
What is your family's average yearly income?

	Survey Respondents
■Under \$15,000	52
\$15,000-\$29,999	74
\$30,000-\$49,999	94
\$50,000-\$74,999	96
\$75,000-\$99,999	88
\$100,000-\$150,000	72
Over \$150,000	23
■ Prefer not to answer	31
Skipped/Not Applicable	243

How many children in your household currently need child care?

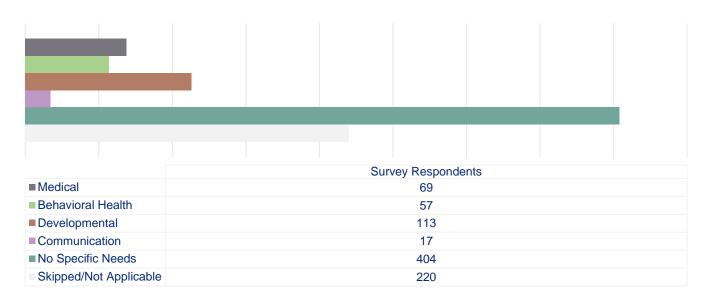


How old are the children that need child care? (please check all that apply)

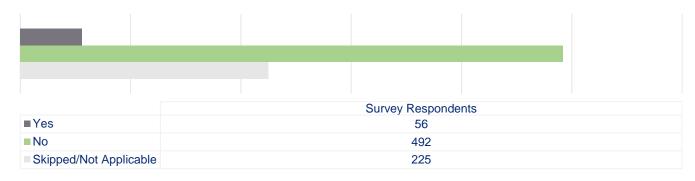


Do any of the children that need child care have specific needs?

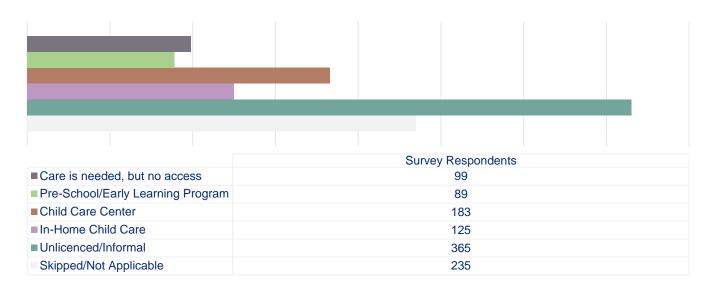
- Medical (asthma, allergies, dietary restrictions, medications)
- Behavioral Health (severe behaviors, trauma, mental health conditions)
- Developmental (speech, motor and learning, Autism spectrum disorder, ADHD)
- Communication (hearing or sight impaired, English as a second language, learning styles)



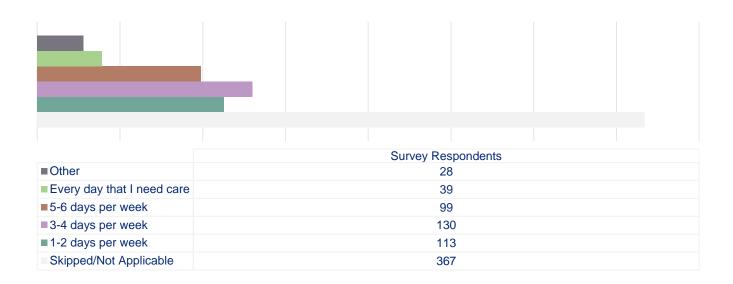
Have you ever been told that a child in your family might be a better fit in another child care setting than the one they were enrolled in, or were expelled from a child care program?



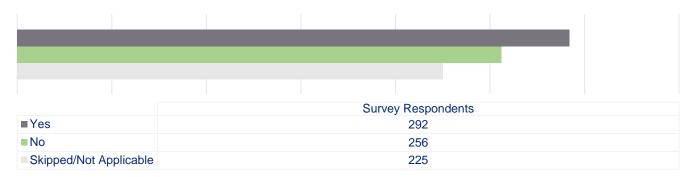
What types of child care providers currently support your family? (please check all that apply)



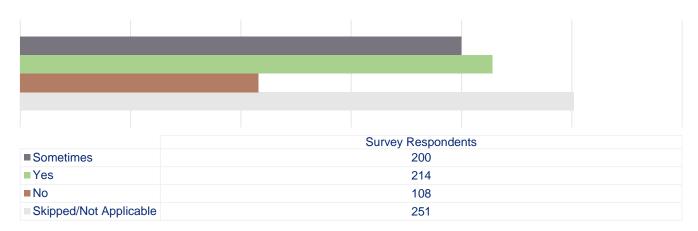
If you answered "friends, family, neighbors, nannies, babysitters or other unlicensed child care providers", about how many days a week do you depend on that type of child care?



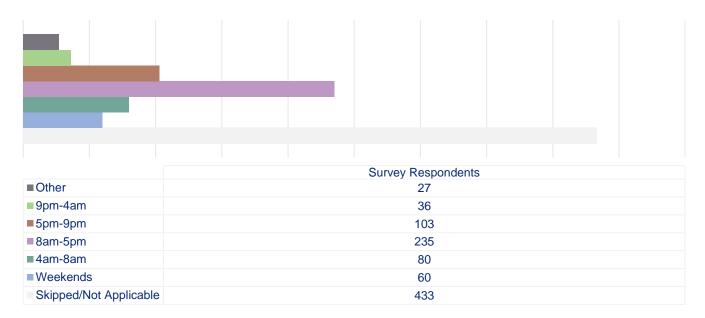
Has anyone in your household reduced their hours, stopped working or attending college, because you did not have access to child care?



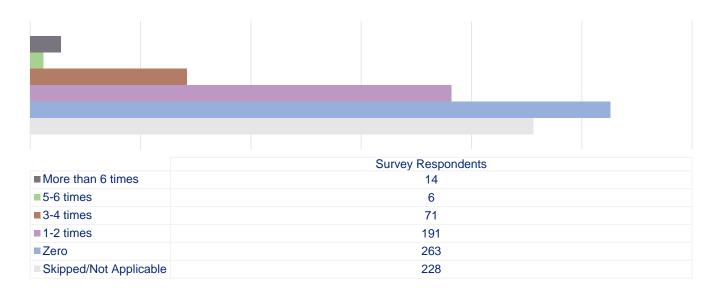
Are you currently able to access child care during the days and times that you need it?



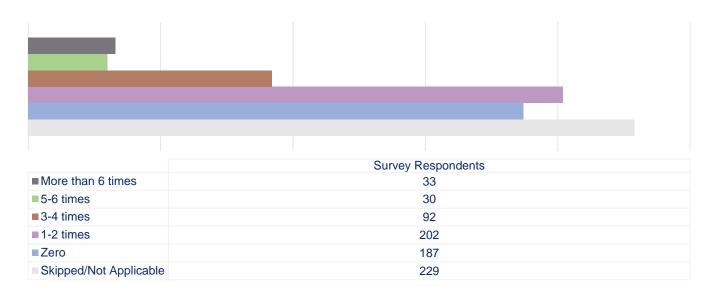
If you do not have access during the days and times that you need it, when do you need child care? (please check all that apply)



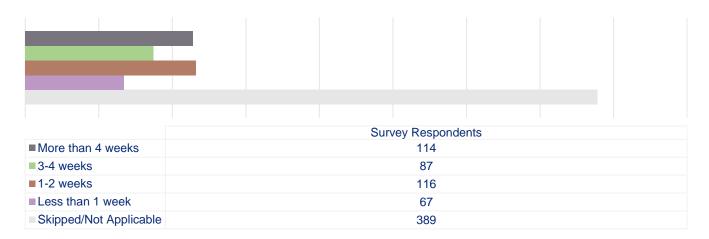
How many times have you had to look for a new child care provider in the past year?



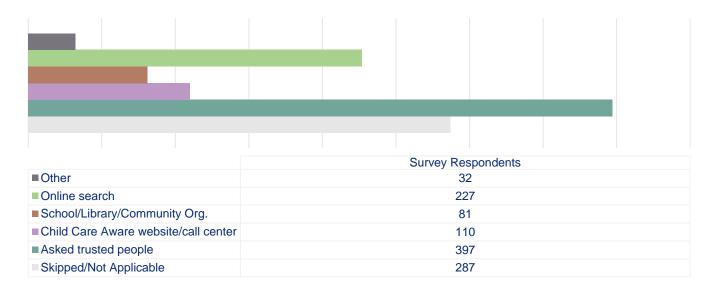
How many times have you had to look for a new child care provider in the past three years?



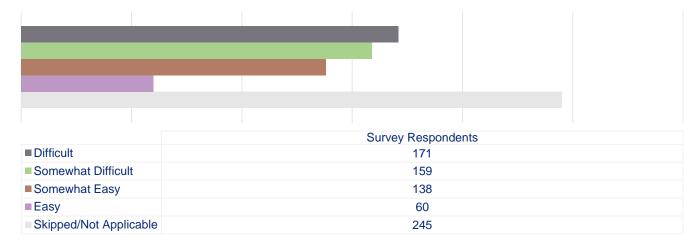
About how long does it take you to find a new child care provider when you need one?



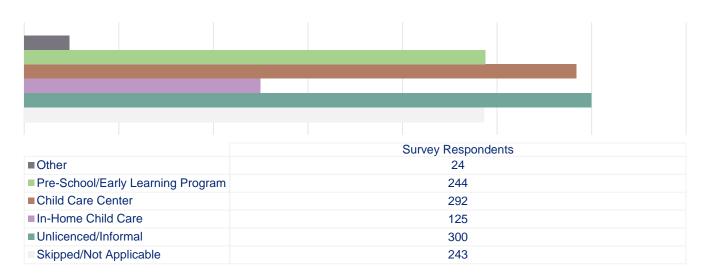
What resources have you used to find child care? (please check all that apply)



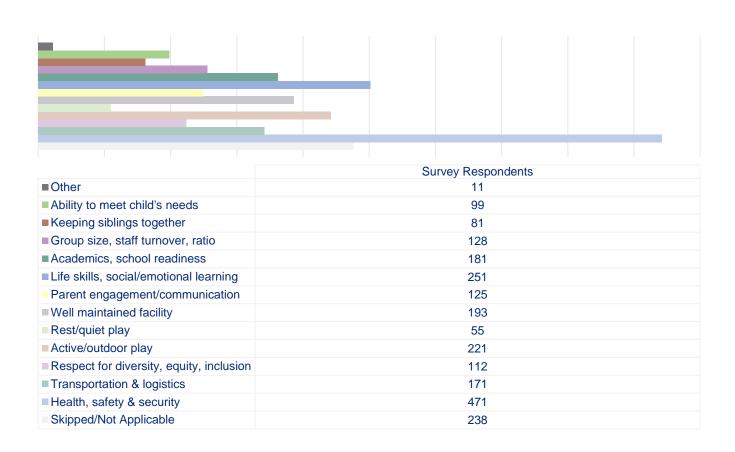
Overall, how easy, or difficult is it for your family to find child care when you need it?



What types of child care providers would you prefer to support your family's child care needs? (please check all that apply)



Choose the top 3 qualities your family looks for in a child care provider. (please check 3)



What is something that our community could do to improve the local child care system that would make your life better?

100 of 312 responses

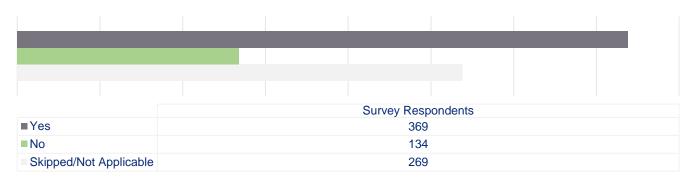
- Make school transportation safer, less to worry about
- We could be more supportive to early care education workforce. Mostly focus on the health, happiness and safety of our children.
- more availability for school age children
- evening (daycare)
- Make more affordable for people who do not qualify for assistance
- I think it is fine as it stands
- offer more child care facilities even back up facilities for regular daycare and options
- lower ratios (of children to staff)
- better trained support staff
- Support the center financially to make care cheaper.
- More infant care. Very few centers that take infants.
- Make child care more affordable.
- Consider 24 hour, 7days a week service
- Have many workers diverse with kids needs.
- Sometimes I don't find one (childcare) and miss out on jobs. I can never find daycares that are open when I need to be
 to work @6 am. Would help if open early and provide transportation to Longview.
- To have an infant room for care.
- Nothing
- Open the availability for school age children. make weekends a possibility for essential workers/parents
- A facility for parents who don't work regular day hours.
- Not close daycare for every holiday the school district is closed. That is when most parents who work actually need care more.
- make it more affordable
- Rural childcare centers
- Make the start process easier with a local office to see one person and extended hours for working parents.
- Proper screening for chilcare workers
- more school age care
- Provide longer hours for parents that work late.
- Offer (childcare) 24/7, when someone works graveyard. Different hours.
- more funding
- weekend childcare
- I wouldn't change anything about my sons daycare. They are amazing
- make centers open later
- Be open weekends
- More facilities around
- Do more programs for children, low cost, fun activities and skills, outdoor activities.
- Just keep doing what we've been doing!
- more 1:1 help with school work
- Healthy places and access to check on children affordable
- Be more affordable
- Cheaper
- Make funds affordable for low income families
- Less costly
- Affordable quality childcare
- Work on ways to make childcare opportunities easier to find. Most of the places I looked at when trying to find childcare were already full and had long waiting lists
- Make it easier to get someone like my mom who's an amazing baby sitter for my daughter to be able to get approved by the state without so much hassle.

- Transportation, before and after school care, weekend care
- Have more learning centers like the Childrens Discovery Museum
- Transportation, well trained staff on kids with behavior issues
- More training for child care workers on how to manage classroom behavior and engage children.
- Larger after school programs
- Not close centers. the Kalama Early Learning Center was recently closed which eliminated one more option. There are waiting lists county wide, we should not be shutting centers down.
- More providers are needed. Make the licensing process less daunting.
- I think our best childcare options are through Early Head Start. That is awesome! However, it is income-based. I wish
 that my children could go to a childcare of the same level of care, at a price that we (middle class) can afford.
- More options for infant care.
- Provide before school care for school district employees.
- More after/before school programs
- Better tools/programs to support working families.
- More options with availability later hours of the day.
- More programs that offer before and after school transportation to and from school
- More after school options with transportation from the school. 3/19/2021 1:27 PM
- Before and after school care would make it to where I can work a full day on the days they go to school
- Have more before school programs for parents that need to go to work early. Places that can transport the child to school when it is time.
- School districts could provide low cost before and after school care for elementary students beginning at 7 am to school beginning and after school until 5:00 pm.
- have more providers open with smaller groups BEFORE school opens or have on campus care BEFORE school I am a school district employee and have a difficult time because secondary school starts before elementary school.
- I wish that early learning centers/pre schools were more affordable and had more openings. My
- daughter will be 4 next month so we are trying to enroll her in Pre-School or an early learning
- center. But I cannot find any that have openings. LCC has an amazing program but they only
- accept families that either attend LCC or are low income. My family does not attend LCC and
- are not low income. Even though we are not too far above their income cap. I think our system
- could be better by offering equal opportunities for ALL families.
- More childcare options for older kids (elementary age). More funding to childcare facilities.
- Lower costs for families.
- Make the cost more affordable to the average income. 3/19/2021 6:43 AM
- Have a childcare center or access to childcare for special needs kids. Smaller group sizes and more adults per child.
- Bring costs down
- Starting day care by 5am and closing at 7pm. Parents work varied shifts not everyone starts at 9am!
- More access to before and after school care on the days my student has school 3/18/2021 9:25 PM
- Smaller child to provider ratio.
- Pre-school for all children
- Make rates more affordable
- Childcare is so expensive. It costs so much that working is hardly worth it for many parents
- Offer more places that offer drop off/ pick up from schools
- Before and after school programs
- Just need more facilities and more staff, which would require more funding.
- 101 More of them 3/18/2021 6:49 PM
- Affordable pricing. Costs too much!!
- I cannot afford to work full-time AND pay for child care. Because of my child's special needs, I
- have been told that he would need a one-on-one staff member assigned to him. I would
- effectively be paying their wages for whatever hours my son was in their care. I am working
- full-time from home, fully participating in all of his medical and behavioral needs, and providing
- all care for him. I am the only parent who has an active role in his life. In short, child care will
- not work for me ultimately due to finances.
- Offer more options for k-5

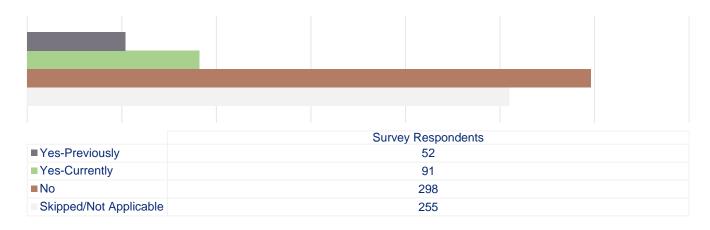
- Have any sort of child care for special needs students, and even better if it's affordable care.
- Provide more opportunities for those who are in the middle. Make to much for reduced fee but it's too expensive to afford on our own
- Bus kids to and from schools at all the daycares.
- More play areas like OMSI!! There is a very big lack of stuff that's fun to do year round for both little and big kids!
- Reduce the cost and have more options available.
- Before/After school care
- The monthly rates in day care centers are so high and only seem to go up each year. Due to few options in day care centers, there is high competition to register in quality facilities before they are full.
- More childcare centers and more child care centers for infants (under 12 months)

See All Responses

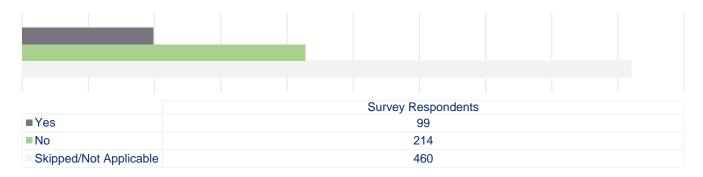
Has the cost of child care ever impacted the type of child care provider you've chosen?



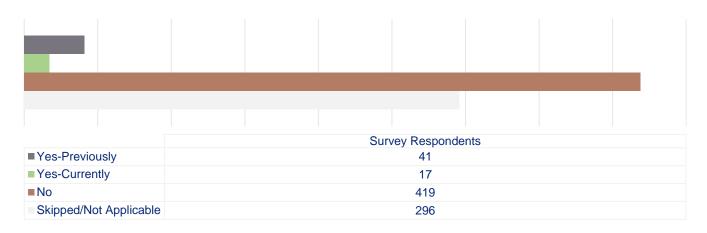
Have you ever received financial help to pay for part or all of your child care? (money from friends or family, tuition waivers, benefit programs, other)



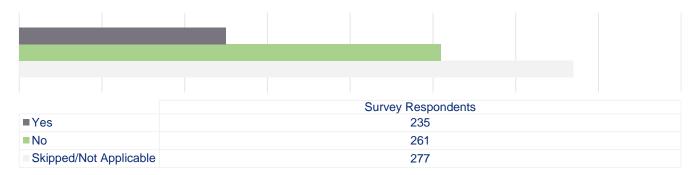
If you have received financial help to pay for child care, have you ever turned down a promotion, salary increase or other job opportunity because the assistance you receive would be reduced or eliminated?



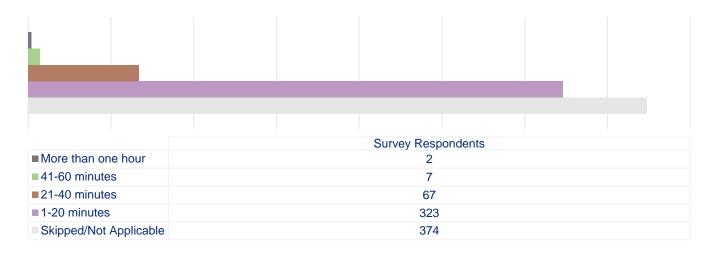
Have you ever used a Dependent Care Flexible Spending Account or other child care savings account?



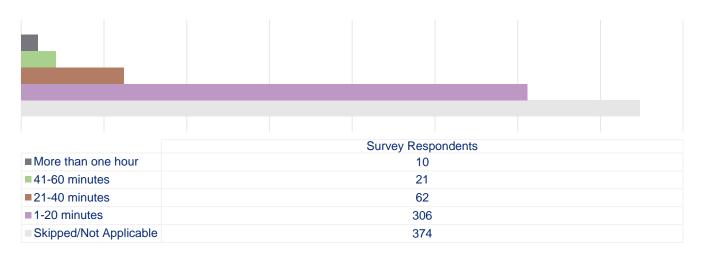
Has anyone in your household reduced their hours, stopped working or attending college, because of the cost of child care?



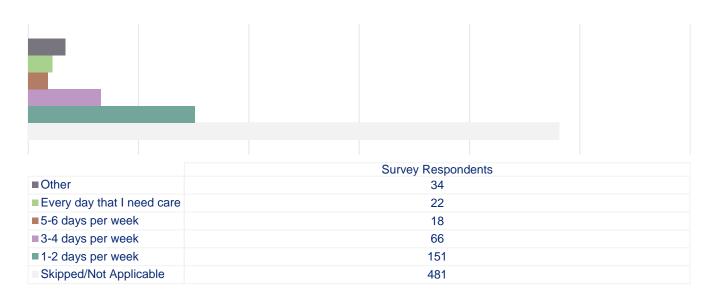
About how many minutes does it take to get from the place that your family stays, to your child care provider?



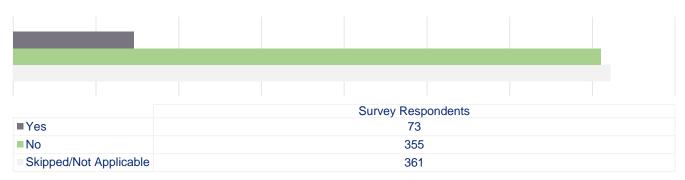
About how many minutes does it take to get from your child care provider to your work/college/regular destination?



About how often do you have to coordinate with someone outside of your household to arrange pick up and drop off for child care?



Does your family currently have difficulty with transportation to or from child care?



If you have ever had difficulty with transportation to and from child care, what was the cause? (please check all that apply)

	Survey Respondents		
■Other	29		
■ Lack of extra car seat/booster	26		
■ Cost of transportation	26		
■ Distance from destinations	34		
■ Availability of Public Transport	16		
■ Hard to coordinate with others	112		
	38		
Did not have access to vehicle	38		