



MCCC Community Needs Assessment

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MCCC

Mid-Columbia Children's Council

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INTRODUCTION

Mid-Columbia Children’s Council (MCCC) is a non-profit organization that provides children and their families with the opportunity, tools, knowledge, and support to receive a positive, high-quality early childhood education. MCCC Early Head Start (EHS) and Head Start (HS) programs provide services to children under five based on income-eligibility, in addition to providing services to expectant mothers, children in foster care, children experiencing homelessness, and families receiving public assistance. The MCCC service area includes two counties in Oregon, Hood River and Wasco Counties, and two counties in Washington, Skamania and Klickitat Counties. MCCC has seventeen EHS and HS locations in the four-county region. At least once over the five-year grant period, MCCC is required to conduct an EHS and HS community assessment to highlight community needs. In 2021, MCCC partnered with Pacific Research and Evaluation (PRE), a research firm based in Portland, Oregon, to complete a community assessment. This 2021 assessment involved secondary data analysis of over 30 sources including reports published by federal agencies (i.e., U.S. Census bureau data), community-based organizations, universities, and MCCC EHS and HS program data. **In 2022, PRE updated the in-depth 2021 community assessment with 2016-2020 American Community Survey data and 2020-2021 HS and EHS Program Information Reports to provide a more recent snapshot of EHS and HS eligibility in the MCCC service area and the services provided by EHS and HS programs.**

METHODS

The methodology for this report consisted entirely of secondary data analysis. Data sources included publicly available information such as the most recent American Community Survey data as well as 17 documents shared directly with PRE by the MCCC CEO. PRE also accessed 10+ additional sources, such as reporting by Oregon State University’s (OSU) Oregon Child Care Research Partnership and the Oregon Department of Education Early Learning Division. While this assessment does not include primary data analysis (such as interviews and surveys), PRE has an ongoing research partnership with the Four Rivers Early Learning Hub that includes recent data collection efforts in Hood River and Wasco Counties. In 2019 and 2020, PRE supported the Hub in administering a family engagement survey and in creating a community plan required by the state for expanding early child care and education. Key findings from these efforts provide valuable insight into families’ child care needs amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and complement this assessment. Each of the data sources referenced in this assessment are detailed in **Appendix A** with the date of publication, the publishing organization, and a summary of key content utilized for this assessment.

Limitations

General limitations that exist with secondary data analysis are that research is relying on aggregate data rather than a more nuanced analysis of individual level raw data files. Throughout the report, limitations are noted when data sources were not available at the desired level of detail (i.e., at the county level) or by the subpopulations of interest. Examples of limited data include those on families experiencing homelessness and children with disabilities. Data are few for geographically isolated communities and counties with smaller populations, such as Klickitat County and Skamania County. For example, there are

very small counts for certain race/ethnicity groups in these rural counties, resulting in the data being suppressed. Underserved groups are often underrepresented in the data collection to begin with, which makes it difficult to analyze trends. Migrant and seasonal HS program data specific to the MCCC service area are not included in this assessment as these programs are managed by Oregon Child Development Coalition (OCDC).

When relying on data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau, it is important to pay attention to the margins of error. Especially for smaller communities, notable undercounts are common, which impacts data points like the percentage of the population experiencing poverty. **Further, young children aged 0-4 are a historically undercounted population in the decennial censuses and other U.S. Census Bureau surveys like the American Community Survey.** As stated on the U.S. Census Bureau website¹, “the COVID-19 pandemic not only delayed collection but also disrupted living arrangements for many families, making the counting of young children even more challenging”. Undercounts in young children vary by race and ethnic groups. The U.S. Census Bureau website notes, “Young children are more likely than other age groups to be in complex living situations such as multigenerational households, households with nonrelatives, or blended family households with both biological and stepchildren, which can lead to children getting missed in the count”. Additionally, because of the closures of early childhood care and education facilities during the pandemic, it was more difficult for census messaging campaigns to connect with families.

Both the original and updated versions of this needs assessment rely on 5-year estimates from the American Community Survey (ACS). These data are collected using a survey administered by the U.S. Census Bureau each year to a sample of the U.S. population. The original assessment utilized 2015-2019 data, while this updated assessment now includes 2016-2020 ACS data. 2020 Decennial Census data are not included in this assessment, as the 2020 Decennial Census was designed to obtain population counts, rather than characteristics. The ACS is the most appropriate data source for this assessment because it is designed to highlight population characteristics (i.e., percentages, medians, means, and rates), such as the poverty or birth rate. Because of pandemic-related disruptions in data collected in 2020, the U.S. Census Bureau revised its ACS methodology to try to mitigate non-response bias. The U.S. Census Bureau cautions that ACS 5-year estimates are not designed to measure rapid change in short periods of time; in other words, the 2016-2020 ACS data only reflect a small part of the impact of the pandemic. In addition, ACS 5-year data are not meant to be compared for overlapping time periods (e.g., you cannot compare 2015-2019 ACS estimates and 2016-2020 ACS estimates because the time frames overlap, whereas you can compare 2011-2015 and 2016-2020 data). **Updating this community needs assessment, which initially relied on 2015-2019 ACS data, with the recently released 2016-2020 ACS data does *not* provide an opportunity for direct comparison, but rather provides a more recent snapshot of the number of children eligible for MCCC services.** Because of the limitations with census data, when available, this report references additional data produced by community-based organizations that can add valuable contextual information and capture the on-the-ground experiences of children and families in the MCCC service area.

¹ <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/03/despite-efforts-census-undercount-of-young-children-persists.html>

FINDINGS

This community needs assessment is structured around the following three sections: (1) assessing who is eligible for services and who is enrolled in HS and EHS (2) identifying where the gaps are in services in the MCCC service area, and (3) offering future considerations for addressing these gaps. When possible, data are provided at the county level.



Current Services

Head Start and Early Head Start Eligibility and Enrollment

Key Findings:

- ◆ According to the 2016-2020 American Community Survey data, an estimated 734 children under five are living at or below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level in MCCC's service area and are income-eligible for EHS and HS services. EHS and HS enrollment data indicate 28.2% of income-eligible children are receiving services in all counties combined as of the 2020-2021 program year.
- ◆ The largest race/ethnicity groups in the MCCC service include individuals who identify as White (non-Hispanic), followed by individuals of Hispanic origin, and these are also the groups with the greatest representation in HS and EHS enrollment. Population trends indicate that the racial and ethnic groups with the highest poverty rates in the MCCC service area (Black or African American, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaska Native communities) however, are the least represented in 2020-2021 EHS and HS enrollment.
- ◆ Public sources of data are limited for young children with disabilities living in the MCCC service area. There is clearly a need for care services for this subgroup, however, as children with an IFSP or IEP represented 15% of total enrollment in EHS and HS programs during the 2020-2021 program year. Similarly, despite the limited public data available related to homelessness in the MCCC service area, there is a need for care for young children experiencing homelessness as they represented 6% of total enrollment in EHS and HS.
- ◆ The distribution of EHS and HS enrollment by primary eligibility remained relatively similar despite the drop in enrollment over time, with a slightly higher percentage of income-eligible (below 100% FPL) children and pregnant enrolled in 2020-2021 than in 2018-2019. There was a slightly lower percentage of children and pregnant women enrolled who were eligible based on public assistance (TANF, SSI, etc.) in 2020-2021 compared to the 2018-2019 program year.
- ◆ Data from the 2016-2020 American Community Survey suggest there may be a need for more EHS services for expecting mothers living in poverty in the MCCC service area.
- ◆ Based on data from the 2016-2020 American Community Survey and 2020-2021 EHS/HS Program Information Reports, income-eligible children birth to two years of age are particularly underserved; 16.7% of eligible children birth to two years of age received EHS services and 44.4% of income-eligible children 3 to 4 years of age received HS services in 2020-2021.

The following section outlines who is eligible for HS and EHS services based on data from the 2016-2020 American Community Survey (ACS). An overview of characteristics of those enrolled in HS and EHS is provided based on the most recent 2020-2021 Program Information Reports (PIRs). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, EHS and HS were not required to report program data for the 2019-2020 program year.

Who is eligible?

Overall, an estimated 734 children under five are living at or below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) in MCCC's service area and are eligible for EHS and HS services. The following tables provide eligibility estimates for the MCCC service area by county. *Please note, the tables below include the poverty rate for children under five reported in the 2016-2020 ACS and assume the poverty rate is similar for individuals ages 0-2 and ages 3-4. Estimated counts for each age group should be interpreted with caution.*

Oregon

Hood River County: According to the 2016-20 ACS, there are an estimated 1,422 children ages 0-4 in Hood River County, Oregon and an estimated 7.0% of these children are living below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) (see Table 1).

Table 1. Eligibility Data for EHS and HS Programs in Hood River County (in terms of 100% FPL)

	EHS age 0-2	HS age 3-4	Combined EHS and HS age 0-4
Population	791	631	1,422
Estimated Poverty Rate	7.0%	7.0%	7.0%
Estimated Eligible Children	55	44	99

Source: 2016-2020 American Community Survey

Wasco County: The 2016-20 ACS estimates that there are 1,597 children ages 0-4 in Wasco County, Oregon and 18.8% of these children are living below the FPL (see Table 2).

Table 2. Eligibility Data for EHS and HS Programs in Wasco County (in terms of 100% FPL)

	EHS age 0-2	HS age 3-4	Combined EHS and HS age 0-4
Population	989	608	1,597
Estimated Poverty Rate	18.8%	18.8%	18.8%
Estimated Eligible Children	186	114	300

Source: 2016-20 American Community Survey

Combined, this leads to an estimated 399 income-eligible children 0-4 living below the FPL in Oregon within the boundaries of MCCC's service area.



Please note the margins of error surrounding estimates of the percent of children under 5 who have a family income below 100% FPL, which are +/- 7.4% for Hood River County and +/- 7.3% for Wasco County. Counts for estimated eligible children should be interpreted with caution.

Washington

Klickitat County: According to the 2016-20 ACS, there are an estimated 1,010 children ages 0-4 in Klickitat County, Washington. Of these, an estimated 21.6% are living below the FPL (see Table 3).

Table 3. Eligibility Data for EHS and HS Programs in Klickitat County (in terms of 100% FPL)

	EHS age 0-2	HS age 3-4	Combined EHS and HS age 0-4
Population	601	409	1,010
Estimated Poverty Rate	21.6%	21.6%	21.6%
Estimated Eligible Children	130	88	218

Source: 2016-20 American Community Survey

Skamania County: The 2016-20 ACS estimates that there are approximately 487 children ages 0-4 in Skamania County, Washington. Of these, an estimated 24.1% are living below the FPL (see Table 4).

Table 4. Eligibility Data for EHS and HS Programs in Skamania County (in terms of 100% FPL)

	EHS age 0-2	HS age 3-4	Combined EHS and HS age 0-4
Population	245	242	487
Estimated Poverty Rate	24.1%	24.1%	24.1%
Estimated Eligible Children	59	58	117

Source: 2016-20 American Community Survey

When all the data are combined, it leads to an estimated 335 income-eligible children under 5 years living below the FPL in Washington within the boundaries of MCCC's service area. Because the two counties in Washington have a smaller population and a higher percentage of children living below FPL, children under 5 years of age in Washington generally are more likely to be living in poverty than in the two Oregon counties in the MCCC service area.



Please note the margins of error surrounding estimates of the percent of children under 5 who have a family income below 100% FPL, which are +/- 11.8% for Klickitat County and +/- 14.3% for Skamania County. Counts for estimated eligible children should be interpreted with caution.

Table 5 shows that a total of (16.3%) of children under five are eligible for HS and EHS programs based on income level across the four counties in the MCCC service area, with infants representing the somewhat larger eligible age group.

Table 5. Eligibility Data for EHS and HS Programs in All Counties in MCCC Service Area (in terms of 100% FPL)

	EHS age 0-2	HS age 3-4	Combined EHS and HS age 0-4
Population	2,626	1,890	4,516
Estimated Eligible Children	430	304	734

Source: 2016-20 American Community Survey

Income Eligibility up to 130% FPL

MCCC HS and EHS programs also provide services to some children under five between 100% to 130% of the federal poverty level. The ACS 2016-20 data for the 0 – 4 age group are only available up to 100% FPL. In other words, information for other poverty ratios, such as 125% FPL, are only available for *all* individuals living in each county and data are not disaggregated by age group (Table 6). Table 6 provides some rough estimates for the percentage of the total population living below 125% of the federal poverty level.

Table 6. Eligibility for HS and EHS Programs in All Counties in MCCC Service Area (in terms of 125% FPL)

	Population below 125% FPL	Total population for whom poverty status is determined	Percent below 125% FPL
Hood River	2,062	23,085	8.9%
Wasco	4,183	25,759	16.2%
Klickitat	5,319	21,971	24.2%
Skamania	1,616	11,782	13.7%

Source: 2016-20 American Community Survey

Race and Ethnicity

The 2016-20 ACS provides race and ethnicity data for the counties within MCCC’s service district. **The largest racial/ethnic group is White (non-Hispanic) throughout all four counties (see Table 7), ranging from 63% to 88% of the county population.** Race/ethnicity is a two-tiered question in the ACS; the first part of the question is about ethnicity in terms of Hispanic origin (yes/no), followed by a list of race identifiers (select one). As such, the sum of the counts in each column below may be somewhat higher than the estimated total population in the final row (e.g., someone may select yes to the Hispanic origin question, and then self-select another race identifier meaning they are counted twice in the table).

Table 7. Population Estimates by Race/Ethnicity in the MCCC Service Area

	Hood River	Wasco	Klickitat	Skamania	Total
Black or African Am.	133	26	252	5	416
% of Total Population	0.6%	0.1%	1.1%	0.0%	0.5%
Am. Indian/Alaska Native	161	848	415	214	1638
% of Total Population	0.7%	3.3%	1.9%	1.8%	2.0%
Native Hawaii /Pacific Is.	0	147	3	30	180
% Total Population	-	0.6%	0.0%	0.3%	0.2%
Hispanic origin	7,252	4,883	2,629	778	15,542
% Total Population	31.4%	19.0%	12.0%	6.6%	18.8%
White (non-Hispanic)	14,641	19,021	18,030	10,319	62,011
% Total Population	63.4%	73.8%	82.1%	87.6%	75.1%
Asian	304	228	132	158	822
% Total Population	1.3%	0.9%	0.6%	1.3%	1.0%
Other Race	942	666	394	114	2116

	Hood River	Wasco	Klickitat	Skamania	Total
% Total Population	4.1%	2.6%	1.8%	1.0%	2.6%
Two or more Races	1,996	1,171	619	305	4,091
% Total Population	8.6%	4.5%	2.8%	2.6%	5.0%
Estimated Total	23,085	25,759	21,971	11,782	82,597

Source: 2016-20 American Community Survey

As seen in Table 7 above, **there is a notable population that identifies with the Hispanic ethnicity across all four counties, ranging from 7% to 31% of the population.** It is important to note that migrant and seasonal workers are not fully accounted for in the ACS data.

While individuals who identify as of Hispanic origin or White (non-Hispanic origin) represent the majority of the population in each county, the highest poverty rates exist in non-majority communities of color. Table 8 below shows an estimate of the number of individuals of a particular racial or ethnic group living under 100% of the federal poverty level in each county and the percentage of the total in that group who are estimated to be in poverty. Cells highlighted in green below include poverty rates over twenty percent. Of note, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders in Wasco County have the highest poverty rate at 74.1%. Communities who identify as Black or African American have a poverty rate of more than twenty percent across three counties in the MCCC service area. Native American communities in Wasco and Klickitat Counties also have elevated poverty rates.

Table 8. Estimated Poverty Counts and Percentages by Race/Ethnicity in the MCCC Service Area

		Hood River	Wasco	Klickitat	Skamania
Black or African American	Est. N in poverty	29	2	60	2
	Est. Poverty Rate	21.8%	7.7%	23.8%	40.0%
American Indian/Alaska Native	Est. N in poverty	0	242	133	21
	Est. Poverty Rate	0.0%	28.5%	23.0%	9.8%
Native Hawaiian / Other Pacific Islander	Est. N in poverty	-	109	0	4
	Est. Poverty Rate	-	74.1%	0.0%	13.3%
Hispanic origin	Est. N in poverty	554	594	124	19
	Est. Poverty Rate	7.6%	12.2%	4.7%	2.4%
White (non-Hispanic)	Est. N in poverty	592	1,756	2,923	1,129
	Est. Poverty Rate	4.0%	9.2%	16.2%	10.9%

		Hood River	Wasco	Klickitat	Skamania
Asian	Est. N in poverty	6	22	15	47
	Est. Poverty Rate	2.0%	9.6%	11.4%	29.7%
Other Race	Est. N in poverty	63	42	17	8
	Est. Poverty Rate	6.7%	6.3%	4.3%	7.0%
Two or more Races	Est. N in poverty	11	240	144	54
	Est. Poverty Rate	0.6%	20.5%	23.3%	17.7%

Source: 2016-20 American Community Survey

Table 9 provides some counts for children under five experiencing poverty by race/ethnicity in the MCCC service area. Several communities of color did not have any data available by poverty status. Notably, **the communities of color experiencing higher rates of poverty were also those with limited data available.**

Table 9. Estimated Poverty Counts by Race/Ethnicity for Children Under Five

	Hood River	Wasco	Klickitat	Skamania
Black or African American	-	-	-	-
American Indian/Alaska Native	-	20	-	-
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	-	-	-	-
Hispanic origin	81	104	3	-
White (non-Hispanic)	18	158	192	114
Asian	-	-	-	-
Other Race	-	-	-	-
Two or more Races	-	84	25	-

Source: 2016-2020 American Community Survey

The Four Rivers Early Learning Hub 2019 Community Plan described **families who identify as Native American in Wasco County as underrepresented in publicly available data.** These families were identified by community stakeholders in Hood River and Wasco Counties as a priority population for early child care and education expansion. Specifically, the Hub’s 2019 Community Plan highlights the need for expansion in the Dufur Elementary School catchment area (where approximately 10% of the school’s population identify as Native American), Celilo Village, and the “In Lieu” sites along the Columbia River where the River Band Tribes live and fish.

Language Spoken at Home

Table 10 shows general population trends among children ages 5-17 in terms of primary language spoken at home (other than English) in the four counties served by MCCC. **Children’s most widely spoken non-English language is Spanish in all counties.**

Table 10. Children 5 to 17 years of Age by Language Other than English Spoken at Home in the MCCC Service Area

	Hood River		Wasco		Klickitat		Skamania	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Spanish	1,630	7.5%	904	3.7%	595	2.8%	83	0.7%
Other Indo-European languages	29	0.1%	10	0.0%	23	0.1%	24	0.2%
Asian and Pacific Island languages	9	0.0%	27	0.1%	0	0.0%	2	0.0%
Other languages	0	0.0%	22	0.1%	18	0.1%	0	0.0%
Total population age 5-17	4,067	-	4,280	-	3,240	-	1,736	-

Source: 2016-20 American Community Survey

Disability Status

Disability data for children under five years is very limited in the 2016-20 ACS for counties served by MCCC, particularly for the more geographically isolated areas. No further disaggregation by race/ethnicity is provided by the ACS specific to children under 5, and yet **multiple sources suggest these data are crucial to identifying trends in childhood poverty and disability by race and ethnicity.**

Table 11 provides what little disability data is available from the 2016-2020 ACS for children under five years of age, with no children identified with a disability in Skamania and Klickitat Counties.

Table 11. Children Under Five Years with a Disability in the MCCC Service Area

	Children under 5 years	With a disability	% With a disability
Hood River	1,450	11	0.8%
Wasco	1,602	30	1.9%
Klickitat	1,010	-	-
Skamania	487	-	-
Total	4,549	41	0.9%

Source: 2016-20 American Community Survey

PRE administered a family engagement survey in 2019 for the Four Rivers Early Learning Hub, and the survey results provided insight into some of trends related to child care and children receiving EI/ECSE services. Findings suggest that Hispanic/Latinx families are in particular need of more specialized care for children with disabilities. Additionally, children in geographically isolated areas who are receiving EI/ECSE services represent another important intersection of need. The Four Rivers Early Learning Hub survey data

are limited to Hood River and Wasco Counties. The key findings, however, align with multiple reports compiled by other organizations in both Oregon and Washington that highlight concerns around limited care options for children with disabilities in rural counties.

Children Experiencing Homelessness

Like disability status, information regarding children experiencing homelessness is scarce and there are notable limitations with accurately collecting this information. 2020-21 McKinney Vento reports are not currently available through the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) website. For 2019-20, McKinney Vento counts indicate that no young children (age 3 to 5) who were experiencing homelessness were enrolled in public preschools and Oregon Head Start programs in any of the school districts in Wasco and Hood River Counties. This information does not align with the 2020-21 EHS and HS program reports; EHS and HS served 21 children experiencing homelessness.

Who is not eligible?

There is an important part of the population that is not eligible for publicly funded child care services, but still needs financial assistance. Those individuals that live above 100% FPL, but below 200% FPL, are often unable to access adequate child care. Data from the Four Rivers Early Learning Hub’s 2019 Community Plan clearly demonstrates this need, indicating that many families in Wasco and Hood River Counties report they feel stuck “in-between” when they make just enough to not qualify for assistance but are unable to afford private care options. Additional family survey data collected by PRE in 2020 for the Hub reveal that the pandemic resulted in notable disruptions to families’ work locations, hours, and child care needs, deepening concerns for parents who already felt stuck. COVID-19 restrictions further reduced child care slots in many child care programs, increased care expenses (especially as parents needed care for their school-age children), and left parents needing more hours of child care. Table 12 shows the proportion of all individuals that fall between 100% and 200% FPL. **This 100 to 200% FPL group overall represents a larger portion of the total population (20.5%) in the MCCC service area than those living below 100% FPL (10.4% of the total population) and includes a notable group of children with limited access to adequate care.**

Table 12. Population Estimates for Individuals Living between 100% and 200% FPL in the MCCC service area

	Below 100% FPL	At or below 200% FPL	Between 100%-200% FPL	Total population with poverty status data	Percent between 100-200% FPL
Hood River	1,187	5,987	4,800	23,085	20.8%
Wasco	2,813	8,633	5,820	25,759	22.6%
Klickitat	3,397	7,893	4,496	21,971	20.5%
Skamania	1,271	3,076	1,805	11,781	10.8%

Source: 2016-2020 American Community Survey

Table 13 reports the proportion of individuals who fall between 125% FPL and 200% FPL in the MCCC service area. Hood River and Wasco Counties have the highest percentages of individuals living between these poverty ratios at 17%. There are limitations as the data are not disaggregated by age group in the

ACS data; more data are necessary to better understand the percentage of children below 5 that live between 125% and 200% FPL.

Table 13. Population Estimates for Individuals Living between 125% and 200% FPL in the MCCC service area

	At or below 125%	Between 125%-200% FPL	At or below 200% FPL	Total population with poverty status data	Percent between 125%-200% FPL
Hood River	2,062	3,925	5,987	23,085	17.0%
Wasco	4,183	4,450	8,633	25,759	17.3%
Klickitat	5,319	2,574	7,893	21,971	11.7%
Skamania	1,616	1,460	3,076	11,781	12.4%

Source: 2016-2020 American Community Survey

Who is currently being served by MCCC?

The 2016-2020 ACS data suggest that there are approximately 734 income-eligible children ages 0-4 in the service area. EHS and HS enrollment data reported by the MCCC indicate that 28.2% of these income-eligible children are receiving services in all counties combined. HS and EHS programs maintain a database of information on enrolled children and pregnant women, including characteristics such as age, eligibility type, race and ethnicity, primary language, early intervention services, new enrollment, foster care status, and homelessness. Based on the 2020-2021 Program Information Report, **a total of 207 children living below 100% of the FPL were enrolled in HS and EHS in the service area** (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Estimated Eligible Children (100% FPL) Under 5 vs. EHS and HS Income-Eligible Enrollment



During the 2020-21 program year, EHS reports indicate 124 slots were made available with EHS-funded enrollment and non-federal funding sources (i.e., state, local, and private) in the MCCC service area. EHS services were provided to 111 families, including 5 pregnant women and 126 children 0 – 2 years of age.

As seen in Table 14, of the 131 children and pregnant women enrolled, just over half (55.0%, n = 72) received EHS services based on their family income being below 100% FPL. The remaining children and pregnant women were identified as eligible for EHS because their family was receiving public assistance such as TANF or SSI, the child was in foster care, the child or family was experiencing homelessness, or the family’s income was between 100% and 130% FPL. Additionally, an estimated 8.4% (n = 11) of children and pregnant women served did not qualify for publicly funded slots (i.e., “over income”).

During the 2021-21 program year, HS reports indicate 291 slots were made available with HS-funded enrollment and non-federal funding sources (i.e., state, local, and private) in the MCCC service area. HS services were provided to 219 families, including 243 children two or more years of age.

Of these 243 children, an estimated 55.6% (n = 135) received HS services based on income-eligibility (below 100% FPL). The remaining children and pregnant women were identified as eligible for HS because their family was receiving public assistance such as TANF or SSI, the child was in foster care, the child or family was experiencing homelessness, or the family's income was between 100% and 130% FPL. Additionally, an estimated 7.4% (n = 18) of children were served who did not qualify for publicly funded (i.e., "over income").

Table 14. Enrollment Data by Primary Eligibility Category for MCCC Service Area

	Below 100% FPL	Between 100% and 130% FPL	Public Assistance (TANF, SSI, etc.)	Foster Child	Homeless	Over Income	Total Enrolled
EHS	72	17	14	11	6	11	131
HS	135	42	20	13	15	18	243
Total	207	59	34	24	21	29	374

Source: MCCC EHS PIR 2020-2021, MCCC HS PIR 2020-2021

Compared to 2018-2019 PIR reports, total enrollment for 2020-2021 has dropped notably from 626 children and pregnant women to 374. Figures 2 and 3 below show enrollment by primary eligibility for 2018-2019 and 2020-2021 program years. The distribution of enrollment by primary eligibility has remained relatively similar despite the drop in enrollment over time, with a slightly higher percentage of income-eligible (below 100% FPL) children and pregnant enrolled in 2020-2021 than in 2018-2019. There is a slightly lower percentage of children and pregnant women eligible based on public assistance (TANF, SSI, etc.) in 2020-2021 than in the 2018-2019 program year.

Figure 2. Percentage of HS and EHS Enrollment by Primary Eligibility, 2018-2019 PIR

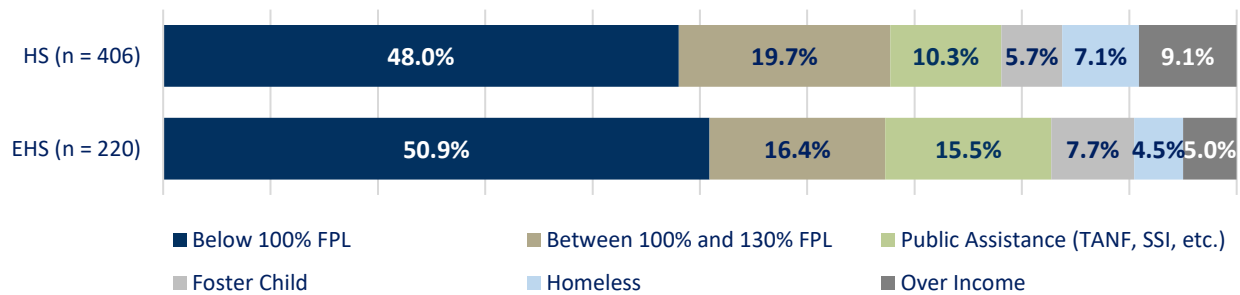
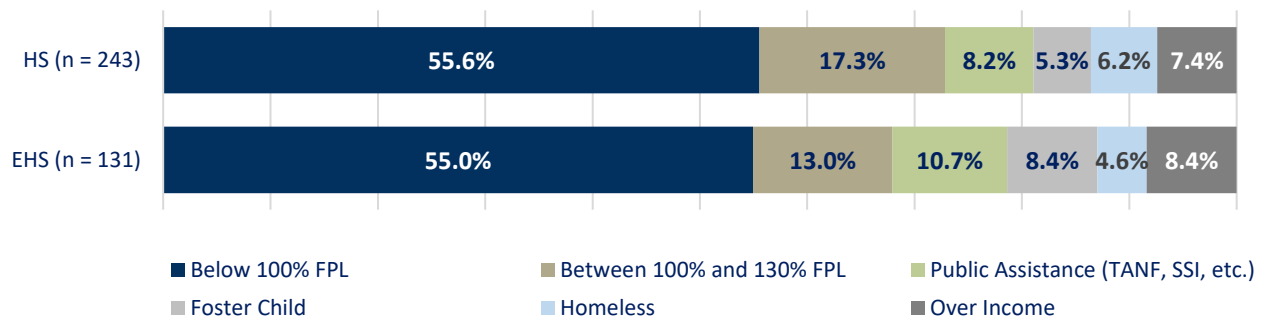


Figure 3. Percentage of HS and EHS Enrollment by Primary Eligibility, 2020-2021 PIR



In 2020-21, five pregnant women were enrolled in EHS programs (Table 15) compared to 17 pregnant women in 2018-2019. All five women were enrolled in Medicaid and received prenatal health care and education on the importance of nutrition while enrolled in the EHS program. Most (4 out of 5) women also received postpartum care, education on fetal development, and information on the benefits of breastfeeding. One of these women experienced a medically high-risk pregnancy.

Table 15. Enrollment Data by Age for MCCC Service Area

MCCC Service Area	Pregnant Women	Under 1 Year	1 Year	2 Years	3 Years	4 Years	Total enrolled
EHS	5	27	40	59	-	-	131
HS	-	-	-	23	98	122	243

Source: MCCC EHS PIR 2020-2021, MCCC HS PIR 2020-2021

For context, Table 16 provides estimated birth rates and the number of women who gave birth in the past year for each county in MCCC’s service area. **The counts and birth rates for women 15 to 50 years with an income under 100% FPL suggest that there is more need for services for expecting mothers living in poverty across the MCCC service area and especially in Wasco County.**

Table 16. Estimated Births and Birth Rates, by County and Poverty Status

	Total number of women for whom poverty status is determined	Number of women 15-50 years who gave birth in past 12 months	Birth rate among women 15-50 years	Number of women 15-50 years who gave birth in past 12 months under 100% FPL	Birth rate among women 15-50 years under 100% FPL
Hood River	5,484	223	4.1%	0	0.0%
Wasco	5,448	302	5.5%	115	2.1%
Klickitat	4,170	187	4.5%	34	0.8%
Skamania	2,367	39	1.6%	27	1.1%

Source: 2016-2020 American Community Survey

Enrollment By Health Care Access

All EHS-enrolled children and the vast majority of HS-enrolled children had health insurance and continuous access to quality care at the end of enrollment in the 2020-2021 program year (Table 17). The percentage of children with up-to-date preventative care increased from 63% in 2018-19 to 84% in 2020-21 for EHS and remained at around 86% over time for HS.

Table 17. Child Enrollment in EHS and HS by Health Care Access at the End of Enrollment

	Has Health Insurance	% of Total Enrolled	Continuous Access to Quality Health Care	% of Total Enrolled	Up-to-date Preventative Care	% of Total Enrolled	Continuous Access to Quality Dental Care	% of Total Enrolled
EHS	126	100.0%	126	100.0%	106	84.1%	107	84.9%
HS	241	99.2%	241	99.2%	209	86.0%	222	91.4%

Source: MCCC EHS PIR 2020-2021, MCCC HS PIR 2020-2021

Enrollment by Race and Ethnicity

According to the 2020-21 Program Information Reports, 131 children and pregnant women were enrolled in EHS and 243 children were enrolled in HS. Of these women and children, most identify as White or Hispanic and reflect the largest racial and ethnic groups present in all four counties (Table 18). **Population trends indicate that the racial and ethnic groups with the highest poverty rates in the MCCC service area (Black or African American, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaska Native communities), however, are the least represented in 2020-2021 enrollment.**

Table 18. Enrollment in EHS and HS by Race and Ethnicity

	Black or African Am.	Am. Indian/Alaska Native	Asian	Native Hawaii/Pacific Is.	Hispanic	White (non-Hispanic)	Multi-Racial	Total
EHS	0	4	0	2	49	68	8	131
HS	0	10	2	2	96	121	12	243
Total	0	14	2	4	145	189	20	374

Source: MCCC EHS PIR 2020-2021, MCCC HS PIR 2020-2021

Enrollment by Disability, Homelessness, and Foster Care Status

Additional subgroups of children who are tracked by EHS and HS include children with disabilities, children who experience homelessness, and children who are in foster care (Table 19). Public sources of data for these subgroups are available in a limited capacity, making it challenging to identify the number of children who may actually need additional services related to disabilities, homelessness, and foster care in the MCCC service area. The 2022 OCDC community assessment provides some related information, highlighting that there are a higher number of foster care children in rural counties. **During the 2020-2021 program year, children with an IFSP or IEP represented 15.2% (n = 57) of total HS and EHS enrollment, children experiencing homelessness represented 5.6% (n = 21) of total enrollment, and children in foster care represented 6.4% (n = 24) of total enrollment.**

Table 19. Subcategories of Eligibility for EHS and HS in MCCC Service Area

	Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) / Individualized Education Plan (IEP)	Experienced Homelessness	Received Foster Care Services
EHS	13	6	11
HS	44	15	13
Total	57	21	24

Source: MCCC EHS PIR 2020-2021, MCCC HS PIR 2020-2021

Table 20 indicates primary disability categories for the HS program. **Half (50.0%) of the 44 children with an identified disability have a speech language impairment.**

Table 20. Disability Data for Children Enrolled in HS in MCCC Service Area

	Speech Language Impairment	% of Total with Disability	Developmental Delay	% of Total with Disability	Other Disability	% Total with Disability
HS	22	50.0%	17	38.6%	5	11.4%

The 2016-2020 ACS data indicate 11 children under 5 five have an identified disability in Hood River County, 30 children under five have an identified disability in Wasco County, and no children have an identified disability in Skamania or Klickitat Counties. These ACS data are clearly undercounts as the 2020-21 HS and EHS enrollment numbers alone, which include 57 children with an IFSP or IEP, surpass the 41 children with an identified disability in the MCCC service area.

Enrollment By Languages Spoken at Home

Table 21 shows primary language data disaggregated by program. **Among children enrolled in MCCC’s early learning programs, around one-quarter (27.6%) of children spoke Spanish as their primary language in 2020-2021.** The percentage of children who speak Spanish remained stable over time (in the 2018-2019 program year, 28.1% of enrolled children spoke Spanish). Further, in 2020-2021, EHS included 38 Dual Language Learners, and HS included 69 Dual Language Learners. Enrollment reflects the most widely spoken non-English language spoken by children under five across all counties in the MCCC service area.

Table 21. Primary Languages Spoken at Home and Percentages, by Program

	EHS	Percent of total enrolled	HS	Percent of total enrolled
English	96	76.2%	174	71.6%
Spanish	35	27.8%	67	27.6%
Other Language	0	0.0%	2	0.8%

Source: MCCC EHS PIR 2020-2021, MCCC HS PIR 2020-2021

Eligibility Compared to Enrollment

Based on data from the 2016-2020 American Community Survey and the 2020-2021 EHS and HS Program Information Reports, it is clear that income-eligible children birth to two years of age are particularly underserved, with additional need for access to services for income-eligible children 3 to 4 years of age.

Table 22 shows that only 16.7% of children ages 0-2 who are eligible based on a family income below 100% FPL are receiving services through EHS in the MCCC service area. Forty-four percent (44.4%) of children ages 3-4 who are eligible based on a family income below 100% FPL are receiving services through HS as of the 2020-21 program year.

Table 22. Eligible Children Being Served in MCCC Service Area

	Total Enrolled	Enrolled with Primary Eligibility: Below 100% FPL	Estimated <i>N</i> Eligible Based on 100% FPL	Est. Percent Served Below 100% FPL
EHS	131	72	430	16.7%
HS	243	135	304	44.4%
Total	374	207	734	28.2%

Source: MCCC EHS PIR 2020-2021, MCCC HS PIR 2020-2021, 2016-2020 American Community Survey



GAPS IN SERVICES

Service Gaps and Community Needs.

Key Findings:

- ◆ A reoccurring theme in the data is that families face a lack of available spots in publicly funded and private child care programs in the MCCC service area, and this is especially the case for infants (ages 0-2).
- ◆ Families in Oregon and Washington with children with disabilities often struggle to access adequate care for their children. The biggest challenge in providing quality child care is the need for individuals who are trained and experienced in working with children with disabilities that work in locations families can easily access.
- ◆ There is a need for more data regarding children experiencing homelessness in MCCC's four-county region, especially as this population is served by HS and EHS programs. Two important factors that contribute to homelessness in Washington and Oregon include the rising cost of rent and the limited supply of housing available.
- ◆ New policies supporting minimum wage increases and child tax credit adjustments intended to reduce childhood poverty run the risk of pushing families just over the threshold of eligibility to receive a variety of services offered to families living below FPL. Additional COVID-19 relief benefits, such as extended unemployment insurance, have further contributed to this issue and have only offered a temporary safety net for families living in poverty. More data are needed to better estimate the effects of these local policies on income eligibility for child care assistance.
- ◆ Community needs in the MCCC service area include an increase in qualified early learning teachers and expansion of child care programs at large, especially for infants (age 0-2). Data suggest there is an additional need for EHS services for expecting mothers. Further, families across the MCCC service area require transportation to care and more flexible and affordable care options, especially as the pandemic has exacerbated the lack of available spots in programs.

Gaps in services are identified below that have a notable impact on access to child care in the MCCC service area. The following section outlines what the gaps are, where they exist, why they have emerged, and what the needs of the community are going forward.

What are the gaps?

Overall, the lack of available spots in child care programs as well as limited flexible and accessible child care options are essential areas to address in terms of gaps in early child care and education services. Three groups that especially struggle to access these services include children with disabilities, children experiencing homelessness, and families that currently are or soon will be living between 100 and 200% of the federal poverty level.

Saturation levels and child care deserts for children under five

Saturation levels refer to the number of eligible children who receive services. **A reoccurring theme in the data is that families face a lack of available spots in child care programs in the MCCC service area.**

Considerations for this community needs assessment include not only those eligible for HS and EHS based on income level and other factors, but also wider trends around how many children in the service area have access to child care in any capacity. This report refers to public and private slots, meaning publicly funded or privately paid space for one child to receive a full day of care. Regulated child care refers to care facilities registered with the state (center-based, large home-based, and small home-based care) that are eligible to receive public funding slots. Data on saturation levels is compiled differently in Oregon and Washington, and therefore discussed separately below. Organizations such as the Washington State Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF), Child Care Aware, and Oregon's Early Learning Division each create reports on saturation and child care deserts independently. Head Start and Early Head Start programs also track saturation data in their Program Information Reports.

Flexible and accessible child care options

The 2019 Four Rivers Early Learning Hub Community Plan indicates that there are a number of gaps related to access to child care in Hood River and Wasco Counties in Oregon. **Parents have limited options for transporting their children to the place of care, must often miss work to care for children, and need longer or different hours of care than are available.** Data from the Washington DCYF parallels findings in the Four Rivers Early Learning Hub report. Educational Service District (ESD) 112, which provides services in Klickitat County, conducted a 2018 community assessment that further emphasized concerns with transportation and a lack of child care providers.

Children with disabilities

One trend noted in OCDC's 2017 Statewide Community Assessment Update indicates that **families who have children eligible to receive EI/ECSE services often struggle to access adequate care for their children.** These children either have an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), depending on disability status and age of the child. There are at least 13 federally recognized categories of disability that the government provides services for; the five most common areas of disability in the MCCC service area are speech or language impairment, developmental delay, autism, emotional disturbance, and health impairment. Other common categories of disability include visual impairment, hearing impairment, and physical disabilities that do not necessarily affect the child's health. Typically, a child needs to be diagnosed by a medical or mental health professional in the community to receive services, but this is not always the case. Speech and language impairments and autism spectrum disorder do not generally require formal diagnoses outside of the school to receive services.

The biggest challenge in providing adequate, quality child care to these children is the need for trained and experienced individuals to work in areas the families have access to. Typically, families who live below FPL have difficulty finding transportation to take children a greater distance from where they live. This means that either adequate, quality child care for children with disabilities must be available in regions near these families or better access to transportation needs to become available.

Nexus Areas for Families with Children Receiving EI/ECSE Services

Beyond just the need for trained and experienced individuals to work with children with disabilities, families who speak a language other than English as their primary language need access to primary language communication and resources. **The Four Rivers Early Learning Hub Community Plan (2019) highlighted families who identify as Hispanic/Latinx and who have a child with a disability as a nexus area in terms of the need for better care options. This same Community Plan also highlighted the need for more care options for children with disabilities in rural or geographically isolated areas.**

Children Experiencing Homelessness

There is currently limited data available about children experiencing homelessness in the MCCC service area. Enrollment data are available for unhoused children enrolled in EHS and HS based on the most recent Program Information Reports (2020-21). While children experiencing homelessness only account for a small percentage (5.6%) of children enrolled in EHS and HS, it is important to note that homelessness and houselessness are difficult to track and are often not accurately measured. Children experiencing homelessness or houselessness are likely to have a more difficult time accessing high quality, consistent child care.

"I quit my job in order to stay home with my son because I could not find quality child care that was affordable enough to make it worthwhile to go back to work. (i.e. I would only be bringing home a few hundred dollars per month after paying for child care.) It wasn't worth it to us and we decided I would care for him, even though it has been challenging financially."

**-Example of family input
from the Four Rivers Community Plan**

Families at or below 100%-200% FPL

Families with young children living between 100% and 200% FPL in the MCCC service area are likely to have difficulty accessing affordable child care. Evidence from data collected for the Four Rivers Early Learning Hub's community plan (2019) indicates that these families struggle to pay for child care. The research to support the Hub's Community Plan was conducted by PRE. The income generated from one more adult in the workforce would help with covering child care costs, but without child care assistance, families are often resigned to living off a single income.

Where are the gaps?

There are notable gaps in available data as well as gaps in child care services, and both types of gaps often exist for the same populations. The following highlights where these gaps have emerged in the MCCC service area.

Oregon

In 2019, Children First for Oregon published data indicating Hood River County had a 34.4% early education enrollment rate (compared to the Oregon statewide rate of 43.7%). This refers specifically to children ages 3-4 enrolled in school. **Additionally, this report notes Hood River had a child poverty rate of 14.6%**, as compared to the federally estimated 6.6% child poverty rate found in the 2016-2020 ACS (see

Table 1). Wasco County had an early education enrollment rate at 33.6% of children ages 3-4. **Based on data compiled by Children First for Oregon, Wasco’s childhood poverty rate was higher at 20.8%** (as compared to the federally estimated 18.8% child poverty rate found in the 2016-2020 ACS, see Table 1). **These data indicate there are likely more children eligible for HS and EHS than the census data capture.**

Oregon’s Early Learning Division reports data in terms of child care deserts rather than public funding saturation rates. Child care deserts are defined by ELD as a county with fewer than 33% of its children having access to child care slot, whether in publicly funded programs (Head Start, Early Head Start, OPK, Preschool Promise, Baby Promise, etc.) or market price programs. Table 23 shows percentages for Hood River County, Wasco County, and Oregon state as a whole. In Hood River County, only 18% of children ages 0-2 years have access to a regulated child care slot, while 53% of children ages 3-5 years have access to a regulated child care slot. Wasco County demonstrates a similar level of access, with 25% of children ages 0-2 years having access to a regulated slot, and 43% of children ages 3-5 years having access to a regulated slot. **In sum, both Hood River and Wasco Counties are considered child care deserts for children ages 0-2.**

Table 23. Percent of Children with Potential Access to a Regulated Child Care Slot, by Age Group

	Age 0-2	Age 3-5	Age 0-5
Hood River	18%	53%	36%
Wasco	25%	43%	34%
Oregon	14%	32%	23%

Source: Oregon’s Child Care Deserts 2020: Mapping Supply by Age Group and Percentage of Publicly Funded Slots

Washington

The Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families reports data in terms of saturation of publicly funded child care slots. According to a 2020-2021 study, 168 children ages 3-4 are estimated to be eligible for ECEAP services in all eight school districts combined in Klickitat County and only half (51.2%) of these children are being served by ECEAP or Head Start (Table 24). Skamania County is estimated to have three children ages 3-4 that are eligible for ECEAP services in its one school district and none of these children are being served. Of note, most of the underserved groups of children are living in small pockets separated by geography. Geographically isolated children are unlikely to be served by a surrounding school district with extra slots due to the large distances and limited transportation options. Geographically isolated areas are therefore a higher priority for early child care expansion. Based on the percentage of unserved children and child maltreatment rates, the Department of Children, Youth, and Families rated Goldendale and Lyle school districts as a higher priority for expansion than the other school districts in Skamania and Klickitat Counties in 2021.

Table 24. ECEAP Eligibility Data for Klickitat and Skamania Counties

	ECEAP and HS Slots (Age 3-4)	Est. Eligible Children Ages 3-4	Unserved Eligible Children	Percent Unserved
Klickitat County	199	168	82	48.8%
Skamania County	0	3	3	100.0%

Source: 2012-21 ECEAP and HS Saturation Study (Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families).

Table 25 indicates where slots are concentrated as of 2020-21. The Washington Department of Children, Youth and Families study notes a limitation includes that less accurate eligibility counts are provided for school districts with smaller populations, which may cause it to appear that public slots are inflated relative to the number of eligible children. This study emphasizes a need for more community-level data to better estimate children eligible for services.

Table 25. ECEAP Slots and Eligibility Data by School District

	ECEAP and HS Slots (Age 3-4)	Est. Eligible Children (Ages 3-4)	Percent Served
Bickleton SD	0	3	0%
Glenwood SD	0	7	0%
Goldendale SD	68	114	59%
Klickitat SD	10	1	810%
Lyle SD	10	23	43%
Mill A SD	0	0	N/A
Trout Lake SD	0	13	0%
White Salmon Valley SD	31	7	474%
Skamania County SD	0	3	0%

Source: 2020-21 ECEAP and HS Saturation Study (Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families).

Why do the gaps exist?

Multiple reports and sources from both Washington and Oregon indicate a number of reasons why gaps exist between currently offered services and what services the community needs. One of the key reasons why gaps exist appears to be that those children living just above 100% FPL have limited access to federally funded child care and other benefits. Even as Washington’s ECEAP program allows children living between 100% and 130% FPL and Oregon’s Pre-K program allows children living between 100% and 110% FPL to use state funded slots, those living just above these thresholds are not eligible to receive much-needed benefits and services. Other reasons include the high cost of living and non-inflation adjusted income levels, inadequate child care supply, insufficient training and experience for those working with children with disabilities, and a lack of access to current child care slots. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated child care supply shortages and surfaced additional challenges for families seeking care for their children.

Limited options for children just above FPL thresholds

New policies supporting minimum wage increases and child tax credit adjustments intended to reduce childhood poverty run the risk of pushing families just over the threshold of eligibility to receive a variety of services offered to families living below FPL. Critically, this includes access to affordable child care. In addition, temporary relief benefits offered to families in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as increased and extended unemployment insurance benefits, have offered a temporary safety net to families but have also impacted eligibility for other public assistance services.

The number of individuals and families who will be out of the income range that makes them eligible for Head Start and Early Head Start is challenging to predict, but new policies that might decrease the number of children eligible for these services can be identified. Families with young children who live

above 100% FPL but below 200% FPL are unlikely to be able to sustainably afford market rates for child care.

Minimum wage increases. The Oregon Pre-K Community Assessment Update that includes data from 2017 indicates that policies increasing minimum wage are likely to push a significant portion of children who currently are eligible for publicly funded child care slots over the FPL. The Washington Department of Children, Youth, and Families accounted for this effect in its Caseload Forecast Report for 2019-2020 and estimates that 0.3% of children previously eligible for ECEAP will no longer be eligible in future years due to minimum wage increases. **More data are needed to better estimate the effects of minimum wage increases on income eligibility for child care assistance.**

Child Tax Credit. In early 2021, a COVID-19 relief package was passed by the federal government that temporarily increased the Child Tax Credit (CTC), increasing the credit's maximum value to \$3,000 for school-age children and \$3,600 for children under six years of ages for families with an income of less than \$150,000. Families with higher incomes were also eligible for smaller maximum values. A study of the impact of the 2021 expanded CTC on family employment and well-being, released in April 2022 by the Brookings Social Policy Institute, indicates that the CTC lifted 3.7 million children out of poverty as of December 2021. Both middle- and low-income families were eligible, and 79 percent of CTC-eligible families reported receiving the credit. There was no statistically significant change in employment for CTC eligible households, implying that the credit did not create a disincentive among families to work. Families indicated that the CTC helped combat inflation, improve food security, and cover routine expenses like housing, utilities, clothing and essential items for their children, etc. The CTC also improved the financial security of eligible families and allowed families of color to make investments in their children's long-term educational outcomes. Families who received the monthly CTC saw a 35% boost in income, on average (2022 Brookings Social Policy Institute CTC report). Once the monthly expanded CTC payments ended in December 2022, however, family hardships increased notably again. What remains unclear is how the CTC has impacted families who received the credit and who consequently had an increased family income above 100% FPL, making them no longer eligible for crucial services they are unable to afford at the market rate. **More data are needed to better estimate the effects of new provisions in the Child Tax Credit on eligibility of children needing child care assistance.**

Unemployment Insurance. In addition to the expanded Child Tax Credit, many families who lost their jobs as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic became eligible for extended unemployment insurance (UI) benefits, including an additional \$600 a week for UI recipients through September of 2021. In addition to UI, stimulus payments, the eviction moratorium, the student loan forbearance, and the expanded child tax credit offered many low- and middle-income families a temporary safety net. **More data are needed to better understand how extended unemployment insurance, and additional temporary relief benefits, impacted the number of families living below federal poverty level thresholds and, in turn, how this impacted eligibility for public assistance services and programs like EHS and HS.** For example, UI was considered unearned income for SNAP and TANF households, which resulted in some families no longer being eligible for these benefits (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities website).

High cost of living and limited housing supply

Multiple reports, including the 2018 Community Assessment for ESD 112 EHS and ECEAP programs and the OPK Community Assessment Update published in 2017, indicate that **a growing reason for homelessness and houselessness in both Washington and Oregon is the rising cost of rent.** Another factor is **the limited supply of housing available in relevant areas.** In 2022, vacancy rates in the MCCC service area are some of the lowest in the country at 3.3% in Oregon and at 3.6% in Washington. This is a strong indicator of insufficient supply of affordable housing, especially in communities with highly concentrated groups of low-income earning people. Ultimately, there are not enough places for people to live at a rate they can afford. **This housing burden affects families' ability to access transportation, child care, and other forms of support.**

Inadequate child care supply

Regardless of whether slots are federally funded or market price, there is an overall shortage of child care in Oregon and Washington, based on data from

"There is a lack of spaces that are affordable. We don't make enough to pay for the full time care, but make too much to qualify for low income programs. The only affordable option near us has a 2-year waitlist."

-Example of family input from the Four Rivers Community Plan

Oregon's Child Care Deserts 2020 Report, Child Care Aware of Washington's 2020 Annual Report, and the 2021-2026 Washington State DCYF Strategic Plan. This is particularly true for children ages 0-2. The 2021-2016 Strategic Priorities report for Washington County DCYF highlights the following needs; expand access to infant/toddler supports and services, increase intensive home visiting programs for expectant families and families with young children, expand early supports for child welfare-involved families, and increase early intervention services for

infants and toddlers. Care for infants requires a smaller adult to child ratio, meaning providers are more likely to take on more children ages 3 to 5 instead.

Child care deserts are likely to be reduced with increased public funding for early child care. Evidence suggests that publicly funded slots play an important role in maintaining an adequate supply of child care in a given county; several counties in Oregon that are not currently child care deserts would become child care deserts without any publicly funded slots. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated prior child care shortages. The 2022 OCDC Community Assessment highlights the need for people in key care-related positions, such as bus drivers, teachers, front-line child care staff, and supervisors. Further, this same OCDC report notes the impact wild fires and extreme weather events over the last few years on child care need and supply in Oregon. OCDC highlights the need for parenting resources, support from partner agencies, and trauma-informed services for children and families. Amidst the pandemic and natural disasters, it has become especially important to meet families' basic needs such as economic security, food security, and stable housing and to focus on expanding health interventions based on social-emotional indicators for children, families, and early childhood education and care staff.

Lack of affordable care

2020 Child Care Aware Oregon data highlight the affordability of child care by examining the average price of full-time child care vs. the median household income for families with children under six years of age. In Hood River County, the average monthly price for full-time child care is \$805 per child, which represents 18% of the median income for families with a child under six. In Wasco County, the average monthly price of full-time child care is \$840 or 20% of the median income. Child care becomes even more unaffordable for families living below or close to FPL thresholds. In Oregon, the average monthly price of

"My biggest barrier is that programs are not affordable or I do not qualify because my family isn't considered low income but I am unable to afford a private daycare."

**-Example of family input
from the Four Rivers Community Plan**

full-time child care is \$801 per child, which is 47% of the household income for a family of 3 earning \$20,578 – 100% of FPL. The same Child Care Aware data for Washington indicates that the average monthly price for full-time care in Klickitat County is \$987, which represents 24% of the median income. In Skamania County, the average monthly price for full-time care is \$861 per child or 20% of the median income. Families of three living below 100% of the FPL in Washington spend 61% of their household income (\$1,044) on child care per child.

Additional Barriers

According to the Four Rivers Early Learning Hub 2019 Community Plan, a number of barriers to access have been identified by parents. **For many families, transportation is a significant obstacle to accessing child care. For others, the main obstacle is that child care does not align with parent work schedules.** This lack of access to child care disproportionately impacts BIPOC families, and especially those who identify as Hispanic/Latinx in Oregon.

What are the needs of the community?

Community needs in the MCCC service area include an increase in qualified early learning teachers, with a focus on provider training for working with children with disabilities. There is also a need for expanding child care programs at large, especially for infants (age 0-2). Data suggest there is an additional need for EHS services for expecting mothers. Families across the MCCC service area require transportation to care and more flexible and affordable care options, especially as the pandemic has exacerbated the lack of available spots in programs.

Oregon

Multiple reports such as the OCDC's 2022 Community Assessment report identify a shortage in the supply of early care and education teachers as a significant issue in Oregon and Washington. This affects multiple areas of interest, including quality of care and education, health and safety concerns in the place of care, accessibility of care, culturally relevant programming, the ability of families to join the work force, and the quantity of families receiving public assistance. **Child care deserts are a related problem identified by Oregon's Early Learning Division.** According to a report including data from early 2020 (before the COVID-

19 pandemic shut down), Hood River and Wasco counties are child care deserts for children 0-2 years old. Further, each county has less than 60% of its population of children ages 3-5 with access to a child care slot. This indicates that greater access to and a greater quantity of child care providers are needed in Oregon. As noted in the 2019 Oregon Child Care Deserts report, adding slots alone is not the only solution as families cannot utilize added slots unless they are affordable, high quality, and meeting the safety and developmental needs of their children.

"Care is not full-day and my work is impacted. There are no bilingual staff which means there is no good communication happening between teachers and students."

-Example of family input from the Four Rivers Community Plan

One population in Oregon whose needs are especially not being met are young children of Hispanic/Latinx families, and especially those with identified disabilities.

A community plan compiled for the Four Rivers Early Learning Hub in 2019 identifies that the main barriers these families reported in accessing early care and education for their children were: "High program costs, lack of available slots in a program, lack of flexible hours of

operation, lack of transportation to/from programs, limited bilingual providers that can communicate with families, and lack of mental health and special needs supports." Additionally, they identified a need for full-day and school day care programs in a center-based care environment, affordability of care, and the ability to align care with parent work schedules. Families also indicated that they need transportation options and additional support for their children with disabilities. While these families did not identify sharing language and culture with staff as one of their top priorities, they did indicate that having staff share their home language and culture makes child care more accessible.

Washington

A report published by Child Care Aware of Washington in 2019 indicates that the three major needs of families seeking child care for children ages 0-4 are flexible schedules and hours, child care subsidies and financial assistance, and care for special needs children. They found that families were seeking child care for about 18% of children (throughout all of Washington) during non-standard hours of child care. This typically means after 6:30pm or on weekends. About 2% of families sought overnight child care options. Slightly more than 2% of children needed even more flexible child care, such as on a rotating shift, drop-in care, or temporary/emergency care.

According to Child Care Aware, over 57% of families in all of Washington are seeking child care providers that accept subsidies or other public financial assistance. The report highlights that the Washington state subsidy system reimburses providers at rates that do not cover the cost of high-quality care. Providers often only accept a few children on a subsidy, further restricting access for low-income families. **Moreover, 2020 Child Care Aware data indicates a drop in the number of providers and capacity due to the pandemic, with 27% of child care capacity temporarily closed in Washington as of June 2020 and some sites remaining permanently closed.** Finally, special needs children, particularly those under 3 years of age, struggle to find appropriate care. This requires that providers have experience or training with handling the variety of special needs of very young children, a criterion that is difficult for families to locate.

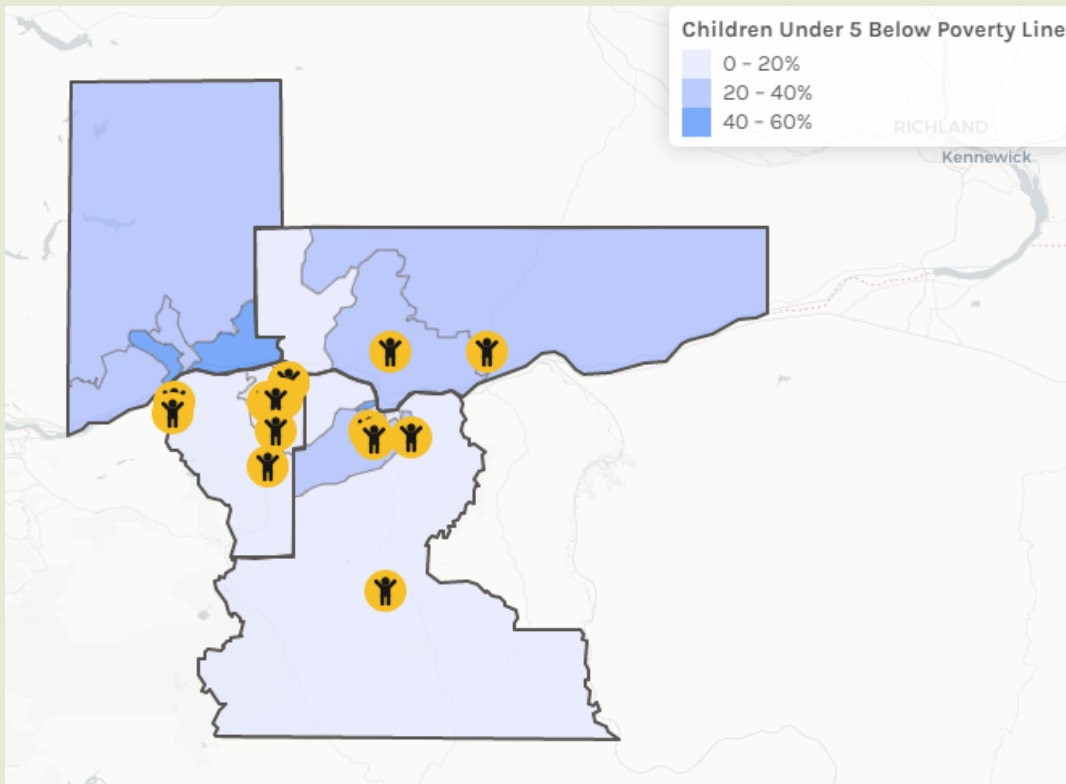
MCCC SERVICE AREA HEAT MAP

The MCCC service area heat map shows where each of the sixteen Head Start and Early Head Start Centers are located. Percentages of children under 5 years old living under 100% of the federal poverty level by census tract are also displayed in this map. All data for this map comes from the 2015-2019 American Community Survey published by the U.S. Census Bureau.



*** Please note that there are high margins of error at the census tract level so data should be interpreted with caution.* This map is best used to understand general trends about children and families experiencing poverty in the MCCC service area. Margins of error are especially high in rural communities.

The map shows the highest child poverty rates in Skamania County and the lowest child poverty rates in Hood River. Margins of error are significant, however trends align with other data referenced in this report. HS and EHS Centers are located in two of the three census tracts with the highest poverty rates between 40% and 60%. Most Centers are concentrated around urban areas suggesting there may be more need in outlying communities (such as Klickitat and Skamania Counties).



To access the more detailed interactive map, please follow the link below:

<https://mccmap.pacific-research.org/>

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

The secondary analysis included in this assessment points towards missing or limited data and gaps in child care services, often for the same populations.

Gaps in data and services include children with disabilities, BIPOC children experiencing the highest poverty rates in each county, children experiencing homelessness, and children in foster care. Further populations experiencing gaps in care include expecting mothers, individuals living between 100% and 200% FPL, and families with infants (age 0-2). While some primary data is available about the needs and preferences of these underserved populations in Oregon through the Four Rivers Early Learning Hub Community Plan, parallel data needs to be collected in Washington, and more detailed data needs to be collected in Oregon.

Monitor Emerging Public Policy Related to Early Care and Education

More data is needed about those families that will be potentially impacted by state minimum wage increases, the Child Tax Credit, and temporary COVID-19 relief benefits like increased unemployment insurance benefits and stimulus payments, pushing families just over the threshold of 100% FPL. Not only does MCCC need to know more accurately how many families might be affected, but also how threshold adjustments could benefit these families. Because HS and EHS enrollment, like other publicly funded programs, is based on income, it is especially important to continue to monitor the impact of emerging public policy related to early care and education.

Consult Additional Data Sources and Stakeholder Data-Sharing

To address these gaps, PRE recommends updating this community assessment on an annual basis with additional data sources that were not previously available. Examples of additional sources include Oregon Department of Human Services data for child welfare and foster care data (extensive data request and approval process) and comparable data from Washington's Department of Children, Family, and Youth, and more community-level data from local, community-based organizations that could provide insight into child care needs for underserved populations.

Additionally, it is important to note that conducting this analysis required consultation of sources from a large number of early learning stakeholders, many who service the same populations in similar service areas. More opportunities for data sharing between these organizations, rather than conducting siloed community assessments, would enhance the analysis.

Continue to Access Reporting about the Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

Data management and collection has been impacted significantly by the pandemic. There are reports that have been recently published, however, that provide an important snapshot of early child care and education needs, some of which are referenced in this updated community assessment. The results of a large-scale quantitative and qualitative data collection effort were recently made available by the Oregon Early Learning Division to showcase statewide trends. **The findings from the household can inform family engagement efforts that are currently being implemented by MCCC to better understand current family needs in the service area and how they compare to statewide findings.**

The 2020-21 Early Learning Division reporting highlights heightened parent concerns with safety, child development, and a reduced child care supply in light of the pandemic. These data collection efforts also reveal, however, that Oregon parents have the same concerns that were already an issue prior to COVID-19, including access to quality care for children with disabilities (especially in frontier counties), a need for more culturally responsive child care options, and a general desire for more available child care slots. A summary of Oregon trends identified in the household survey and parent listening sessions is included below:

Impacts of Covid-19 on Families' Experiences with Child Care (Winter 2020): This report includes findings from listening sessions conducted in 2020 with families across Oregon. Families reported receiving a patchwork of child care from family, friends, and neighbors during the pandemic. Those at home struggle to juggle remote work to care for their children and there was a perceived diminishment in the quality of child care during the pandemic. Parents expressed fear of exposing their children to COVID-19 and concerns that other families utilizing the same care options were not following COVID-19 safety guidelines. Families indicated a loss of income and higher concerns about affordability. Further, families reported concerns over the impact of the pandemic on children's development in terms of limited peer interaction, social emotional health, and kindergarten readiness. Families reported a need for adult emotional supports, connecting with other parents, and more communication from providers. Parents also noted providers were accepting less subsidies as a result of pandemic, and BIPOC families highlighted experiences with racism and not being heard by providers.

Covid-19 and Child Care: A Summary of Findings from the 2020 Household Survey (Spring 2021): A statewide family survey was administered in Fall 2020 to assess the impact of COVID-19 on child care and early education. Findings included a decrease in the child care supply in 2020, and parent concerns over finding the type of care they wanted and the availability of slots. Families reported challenges with finding a provider that reflected their cultural background and/or spoke the child's language. Parents in frontier areas of the state and those with children experiencing disabilities and/or chronic health care needs were most likely to cite difficulties in finding a provider who could support the needs of their child with a physical or other disability. Parents indicated a need for more provider training in effectively working with children with disabilities. Findings also include that children of color and children with disabilities and/or chronic health care needs were asked to leave care at high rates. Most families experienced a disruption in care and special services as a result of the pandemic. The report concludes: "These findings suggest that if families are going to opt for in-home care at higher rates, at least in the short term, considering how to increase opportunities for in-home caregivers to receive information about child development and early learning might contribute to the development of the children in their care. Making such information easy to access would also be important. For families who opt for center-based care, helping those families to understand the precautions being taken to prevent COVID-19 exposure might help to allay some families' worries."

Upcoming Primary Data Collection with Families

PRE is currently working with MCCC to design and administer a survey to families receiving MCCC services, and the findings from this primary data collection effort will complement and deepen the secondary data analysis in this assessment. These survey data will center family voice by providing a current snapshot of families' care preferences (hours of care, types of care, location of care, etc.), what families value most about MCCC programs and suggestions for improvement, as well as how families access local resources and events related to early childhood care and education in their community. The survey data will be disaggregated to highlight needs for populations experiencing gaps in services, such as BIPOC families, Spanish-speaking families, families experiencing homelessness, families with children with disabilities, families with children in foster care, and families living in rural and geographically areas.

APPENDIX A. Methods Addendum

The following table provides additional information about sources and a summary of how they were utilized for this assessment.

Table 26. Sources List with Summaries and Publication Information

Title of Document	Date of Publication	Publishing Organization	Summary
2018 Data Report: Trends, Child Care Supply, Cost of Care, & Demand for Referrals	2018	Child Care Aware of Washington	See pg. 12 for data specific to child care needs identified in Washington state.
County Ranking Data Report Release Final	2019 & 2020	Child Care Aware of Washington	Outlines most and least expensive counties for child care in WA, as percentage of median household income. Provides website to access county-specific data related to costs of child care. Reports statewide trends for child care provider capacity as of June 2020.
Child Care Aware of Oregon; Oregon	2020	Child Care Aware of America	2020 Child Care Aware Oregon data highlight the affordability of child care by examining the average price of full-time child care vs. the median household income for families with children under six years of age.
CFFO-County Data 2019: Status of Oregon Children and Families	2019	Children First for Oregon (CFFO)	County data sheets about population, family supports (including ERDC), health, child welfare, financial stability, early childhood education, and youth development and education.
Columbia Gorge Regional Community Health Assessment 2019	2019	Community Advisory Council (CAC)	Includes data from Wasco, Hood River, Sherman, Gilliam, and Wheeler counties in OR, and Skamania and Klickitat counties in WA, not disaggregated unless specified. Identifies gaps in data. Most relevant infographic: "Built Environment, Part 2," addresses child care directly.

Title of Document	Date of Publication	Publishing Organization	Summary
ESD 112 EHS and ECEAP Community Assessment	2018	Educational Service District (ESD 112)	ESD 112 serves Clark, Cowlitz, Klickitat, and Pacific Counties. Recommendations by ESD 112 including need for more child care transportation options for families. Highlight rising cost of rent and homelessness. Demographic data disaggregated by county. Eligibility and needs of pregnant women, infants, toddlers, and preschool children. Includes data for unserved, eligible children and school districts in Klickitat County (useful for saturation study).
Four Rivers Early Learning Hub: Community Plan	2019	Four Rivers Early Learning Hub / Pacific Research and Evaluation	A 2019 family engagement survey, conducted by PRE, identified families' needs and priorities as it relates to child care in Hood River and Wasco counties. Identifies priority populations, including Hispanic/Latinx Families. Identifies a nexus area with overlapping need: Hispanic/Latinx families with children enrolled in EI/ECSE.
Four Rivers Early Learning Hub Survey Report	2021	Four Rivers Early Learning Hub / Pacific Research and Evaluation	The Four Rivers Early Learning Hub, Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R), and the Regional Solutions Team partnered together to learn more about the needs and challenges that local families and businesses are facing during the COVID-19 pandemic with regard to child care. Research activities focused on assessing child care needs in the five-county region (incl. Hood River and Wasco Counties) and included a family input survey and an employer survey. Surveys were administered online in English and Spanish in September of 2020.
1302.11 Determining community strengths, needs, and resources	Unknown	HS: Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center	Requirements for compiling a community assessment for HS and EHS.

Title of Document	Date of Publication	Publishing Organization	Summary
Early Head Start Program Information Reports	2018-2019; 2020-2021	MCCC	Used data from EHS PIR to report on age, eligibility type, race and ethnicity, primary language, early intervention services, new enrollment, children in foster care, and children experiencing homelessness.
Head Start Program Information Reports	2018-2019; 2020-2021	MCCC	Used data from HS PIR to report on age, eligibility type, race and ethnicity, primary language, early intervention services, new enrollment, children in foster care, and children experiencing homelessness.
MCCC Annual Report	2020	MCCC	Identifies current enrollment data, including disability data.
2020 Estimated Supply of Child Care and Early Education Programs in Oregon	2020	Oregon Child Care Research Partnership - Oregon State University	See pg. 5-10, 12 for tables disaggregated by county.
Hood River and Wasco Counties Community Assessment	2009	Oregon Child Development Coalition (OCDC)	Data on Migrant/Seasonal Farm Workers' children that qualify for EHS and HS services. Overview of economic conditions and eligibility. Used as background information for Hood River and Wasco Counties. OCDC provides services to Migrant/Seasonal Farm Worker families.
Oregon Pre-K Community Assessment Update	2017	Oregon Child Development Coalition (OCDC)	Some data for all of Oregon, but counties mentioned do not include Wasco or Hood River. Data on how raising minimum wage could impact eligibility and create child care deserts in Oregon.

Title of Document	Date of Publication	Publishing Organization	Summary
Statewide Community Assessment Update 2017	2017	Oregon Child Development Coalition (OCDC)	This is an updated version of Hood River and Wasco Counties Community Assessment, but for all of Oregon. Contains tables with info regarding eligibility estimates, income, race and ethnicity, etc., disaggregated by county. Wasco one of highest housing rental rates in state (50% of renters paying above 35% of household income).
2022 Community Assessment	2022	Oregon Child Development Coalition (OCDC)	The 2022 OCDC Community Assessment highlights the need for people in key care-related positions, such as bus drivers, teachers, front-line child care staff, and supervisors. Further, this OCDC report notes the impact wild fires and extreme weather events over the last few years on child care need and supply in Oregon. OCDC highlights the need for parenting resources, support from partner agencies, and trauma-informed services for children and families.
McKinney-Vento Homeless Student Data	2018-2019 & 2019-2020	Oregon Department of Education	Counts for PK enrollment (age 3 to 5) in public preschools and Oregon Head Start programs by school district.
Oregon's Child Care Deserts: Mapping Supply by Age, Group, Metropolitan Status and Percentage of Publicly Funded Slots	2019	Oregon Department of Education - Early Learning Division	Non-metro counties (such as Wasco and Hood River) have a higher proportion of public funding than metro counties but are still child care deserts for infants and toddlers (ages 0-2), though not for children ages 3-5. Wasco has a higher proportion of publicly funded slots than Hood River.
Updated PDG Workbook 2	2019	Oregon Department of Education – Early Learning Division	Estimated HS/OPK enrollment data for Wasco and Hood River Counties; also contains poverty data.

Title of Document	Date of Publication	Publishing Organization	Summary
Raise Up Oregon: Progress Report 2019-2020, Highlights	2020	Oregon Department of Education - Early Learning Council	Report on previous goals surrounding school readiness and child welfare/health. Priorities for 2021-2023 listed. Student Success Act expands current early learning services. Funding provided to pilot coordinated enrollment for Preschool Promise (and OPK, Baby Promise, and other ELD programs to follow).
Updated Oregon Child Care Deserts	2020	Oregon Department of Education – Early Learning Division	Tables 1 and 2 give estimated access to and number and percent of public, regulated slots. Data is disaggregated by county, Oregon only.
Health Complexity in Children - Pacific Source-Columbia Gorge	2019	Oregon Pediatric Improvement Partnership (OPIP), Oregon DHS, OHA	Medical complexity and social complexity scores for children using Pacific Source-Columbia Gorge state Medicaid plan, over a 3 year period, to indicate areas of services and areas of need. Overall, in a sample/population of 6,201 children, "32% of children had some level of medical complexity" (pg. 3).
Child tax credit expansion set to benefit 90% of Oregon's children under 18	2021	Our Children Oregon	Estimated data for children under 17 that would benefit from an increased child tax credit program. BIPOC children would disproportionately benefit. This might affect eligibility for services/resources requiring children to live under a certain percentage of the poverty level.
Saturation Data: Supplemental Master Doc for County Snapshots, Final	2018	Pacific Research and Evaluation (PRE)	Saturation data for Wasco and Hood River counties, disaggregated by age (0-2, 3-5) based on Preschool Development Grant (PDG) workbooks.

Title of Document	Date of Publication	Publishing Organization	Summary
Covid-19 and Child Care: A Summary of Findings from the 2020 Household Survey	2021	Pears, K.C., Miao, A.J., Green, B.L., Lauzus, N., Patterson, L. B., Scheidt, D., & Tremaine, E.	Executive summary of Oregon Preschool Development Grant Birth to Age 5 Strengths and Needs Assessment: 2020 Statewide Household Survey Results. A statewide family survey was administered in Fall 2020 to assess the impact of COVID-19 on child care and early education. Findings included a decrease in the child care supply in 2020, and parent concerns over finding the type of care they wanted and the availability of slots. Needs for culturally responsive child care options, more provider training and options for children with disabilities in frontier counties, support for in-home caregivers, and more parents seeking more information regarding safety precautions taken in center-based care.
Impacts of COVID-19 on Families' Experiences with Child Care	2020	The Center for the Improvement of Child and Family Services - Portland State University and OSLC Developments, Inc.	Research funded by a federal Preschool Development Grant to the Oregon Early Learning Division. Listening sessions with 58 families across Oregon to learn about their experiences and needs related to finding and using quality child care during the COVID-19 pandemic. Provides insight into statewide trends such as disruptions to child care, parent concerns about safety and child development, a decrease in providers accepting subsidies and the need for social emotional supports for children and parents alike.
2016-2020 American Community Survey	2019	US Census Bureau	American Community Survey 5-year estimates regarding population and demographic data for 2016-2020.
2018-2019 ECEAP Outcomes Report	2019	WA State Dept. of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF)	Overview of ECEAP services aggregated for all of Washington state. Most relevant sections are "Enrolling Washington's Most Vulnerable Young Children," "Child Development and Learning," and the two sections relating to kindergarten readiness.

Title of Document	Date of Publication	Publishing Organization	Summary
2019-2020 ECEAP Caseload Forecast Report	2019	WA State Dept. of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF)	Forecasting a need for 4,769 more slots to serve all eligible children likely to participate by 2022-2023 school year. Current slots do not meet needs for children who are both eligible and likely to participate.
2020-2021 ECEAP and Head Start Saturation Study	2021	WA State Dept. of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF)	Saturation data for all Washington school districts. ECEAP expansion priority ratings provided. Based on the percentage of unserved children and child maltreatment rates, the Department of Children, Youth, and Families rated Goldendale and Lyle school districts as a higher priority for expansion than the other school districts in Skamania and Klickitat Counties.
The Department of Children, Youth, and Families - Strategic Priorities 2021-2026	2021	WA State Dept. of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF)	The Strategic Priorities report for Washington County DCYF highlights the need to expand access to infant/toddler supports and services and identifies the need for more intensive home visiting programs for expectant families and families with young children, the need to expand early supports for child welfare-involved families, the need for more early intervention services for infants and toddlers.
The Impacts of the 2021 Expanded Child Tax Credit on Family Employment, Nutrition, and Financial Well-Being.	2022	Brookings Social Policy Institute	A study of the impact of the 2021 expanded CTC on family employment and well-being. Key findings include that there was no statistically significant change in employment for CTC eligible households, implying that the credit did not create a disincentive among families to work. Families indicated that the CTC helped combat inflation, improve food security, and cover routine expenses like housing, utilities, clothing and essential items for their children.