

community needs assessment

2022 -2023

abstract

A report conducted by Early Learning and Family Services of the strengths, needs, and experiences of low-income families with young children in Whatcom County



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Executive Summary

With much of the Covid-19 pandemic in the rear-view mirror of programming for Opportunity Council's Early Learning and Family Services department, some residual effects on enrolled families and staff remain. At the same time, economic challenges reflective of the nation's woes, and other changes in the local early learning and care system pose both opportunities and challenges for our status quo programming and the families we serve:

- The primary costs in household budgets, regardless of income, have spiked during and since the peak of the pandemic. Housing, childcare, gasoline and food have combined for a cost of living unseen in decades in the U.S. Families of limited means have been hit the hardest.
- The social isolation and stress of the pandemic have created increased prevalence of behavioral/mental health needs across the lifespan. In particular, more children in our target market are in need of social-emotional supports and more need professional behavioral/mental health interventions.
- After altering family life patterns around work and school, the pandemic appears to have changed the relationship between families and educational institutions, evidenced by decreased public school and higher education enrollments, and considerable difficulties in filling all of this department's early learning slots.
- In part based on successes in the Bellingham School District's "Promise K" program and facing the financial reality caused by dropping public school enrollments, all but one Whatcom County school district has implemented Transitional Kindergarten to attract the corresponding OSPI revenues attached to each enrolled child. This has had mostly unmitigated impacts on Head Start and ECEAP enrollments. These impacts might impact when, where and how ELAFS provides services.
- Whatcom County's leading-edge Single Entry Access to Services' (SEAS) role in a robust Child Find system and the apparent increase in developmental delay prevalence in young children have led to record-setting numbers of children birth to five who are being identified for services. This has compounded the already significant numbers of children with IEPs historically in our programs.
- Despite many adults not returning to the workforce after the pandemic or returning only part-time, our service area remains a childcare desert for working families and many of the hours of operation of our sites do not constitute enough coverage of the work day.
- As the costs of living have increased and families have moved away from urban areas in search of, at least, cheaper housing, the location of our classroom sites might be too heavily concentrated in urban areas.

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- Although the county's birthrate has largely plateaued, with only 50 EHS slots amidst some 2,100 births per year, we lack the volume of services needed by the most impacted families with children birth to three, and this continues to severely challenge both preschool and K-12 classrooms.
- The county's population continues to diversify, with notable growth in the Hispanic/Latino/LatinX population, resulting in more Dual-Language Learners (DLL).

Methodology

It is the expectation of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families that all grantees conduct a community assessment at least every five years to design a program that meets community needs, builds on strengths and resources, and reflects significant changes in demographics and other key factors.

- **Process** - For the 2023 CNA, data from prior surveys was referenced for comparison and update, and new data was identified through a cross-departmental process including the three main divisions of ELAFS (Birth to Three, Preschool, and Quality Child Care). A Public Health Intern from Western Washington University also assisted.
- **Sources** - This assessment uses a variety of data collection methodologies to increase the probability that the information gathered on families and communities in Whatcom County is valid. These include:
 - local, state, and national government demographic databases and reports, including the U.S. Census and the American Community Survey (ACS)
 - professional association and other reports and studies relevant to ELAFS' service populations or the local communities that form the context for those populations, including from other divisions within ELAFS (such as CCA, SEAS, and ESIT)
 - data from the Whatcom Prosperity Project, an agency-wide Opportunity Council client-intercept report
 - direct feedback from families enrolled in OC/ELAFS programs

Report Format – The 2023 CNA uses the six assessment area guidelines outlined in the Head Start Performance Standards [1302.11(b)] for its structure. In that the Washington ECEAP assessment guidelines specifically state that their assessment “may be aligned with the Head Start community assessment” [PAO-32(1)], and ECEAP-specific standards generally encompass Head Start standards, this report organizes around Head Start standards, listed in the table on the next page, with corresponding ECEAP standards also identified.

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Head Start/Early Head Start	Washington ECEAP
1. The number of eligible infants, toddlers, preschool age children, and expectant mothers, including their geographic location, race, ethnicity, and languages they speak, including: children experiencing homelessness, children in foster care, and children with disabilities, including types of disabilities and relevant services and resources provided to these children by community agencies	1. Where eligible children live, within the contractor's service area; their race, ethnicity and home languages; and numbers of age-eligible children who are: developmentally delayed or disabled, in the child welfare system (including foster care), in families that are homeless, in families with low income, in families where parents work as seasonal or migrant farmworkers, in families in the military, and in families that are American Indian or Alaskan Native
2. The education, health, nutrition and social service needs of eligible children and their families, including prevalent social or economic factors that impact their well-being	2. Community capacity for ECEAP-eligible children and families to access services such as education; medical, mental and oral health; nutrition, social services
3. Typical work, school, and training schedules of parents with eligible children	
4. Other child development, child care centers, and family child care programs that serve eligible children, including home visiting, publicly funded state and local preschools, and the approximate number of eligible children served	
5. Resources that are available in the community to address the needs of eligible children and their families	
6. Strengths of the community	

Overview of the Grantee

Opportunity Council is a private non-profit Community Action Agency serving homeless and low-income families and individuals by providing emergency housing, basic needs, home improvement, and information and referral services, as well as early learning and other prevention or capacity-building programming. The mission of Opportunity Council is to help people improve their lives through education, support, and direct assistance while advocating for just and equitable communities.

In support of this mission, Opportunity Council's Early Learning and Family Services (ELAFS) department works to ensure that all children and families have the knowledge, skills, and support needed for success in school and future opportunities.

ELAFS consists of three main program areas, all focusing on the development of young children in our services areas. They are:

- **Birth to Three Services** (Whatcom County): Early Head Start, Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT), and Single Entry Access to Services (SEAS)
- **Preschool Services** (Whatcom County): Head Start, Washington Early Childhood Education Assistance Program (ECEAP)
- **Quality Child Care** (Island, San Juan, Snohomish, Skagit and Whatcom counties): Child Care Aware of Northwest Washington, Early Achievers, Child Nutrition Programs, Emergency and Homeless Child Care Subsidies, Collaboration for Child Care Training, Center for the Retention and Expansion of Child Care

In addition, ELAFS contracts with the Washington State Health Care Authority to provide **Access to Baby and Child Dentistry (ABCD)** services for Whatcom County, connecting Medicaid-eligible children up to age six with specially trained dentists, and with the Northwest Workforce Council to implement our locally developed **Economic Security for All** program, which helps families build a path to meaningful careers and increased resiliency through financial literacy.

With a 2021 total population of 228,831 and its largest population center (Bellingham) encompassing some 92,290 inhabitants, Whatcom County has at any one time over 10,077 children ages 0-5 in need of nurturing development and support.

For the purposes of this report, we will focus primarily on the needs of the community that ELAFS' Head Start, Early Head Start, and ECEAP programs serve.

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Eligibility Criteria

Eligibility for ELAFS programs depends on funder requirements. Specific eligibility criteria for our Head Start, ECEAP, and Early Head Start programs are as follows:

Figure 1: 2022 - 2023 Selection Criteria

I. AGE:							
<u>Early Head Start</u>				<u>Head Start/ECEAP</u>			
Prenatal 200 Pts.				4.6+ Years 95 Pts.			
0-12 Months 150 Pts.				4.0-4.5 Years 85 Pts.			
13-18 Months 100 Pts.				3.6-3.9 Years 75 Pts.			
19-24 Months 50 Pts.				3.0-3.5 Years 65 Pts.			
25-36 Months 10 Pts.							
II. FAMILY INCOME:							
	(95)	(85)	(75)	(65)	(65)	(15)	(5)
SIZE	0% - 49%	50-74%	75-98%	99-100%	(ECEAP)110%	101% - 130%	131% - above
1	<6,794.00	6,795.00	10,193.00	13,590.00	14,949.00	13,591-17,667	17,668.00 & above
2	<9,154.00	9,155.00	13,733.00	18,310.00	20,141.00	18,311-23,803	23,804.00 & above
3	<11,514.00	11,515.00	17,273.00	23,030.00	25,333.00	23,031-29,939	29,940.00 & above
4	<13,874.00	13,875.00	20,813.00	27,750.00	30,525.00	27,751-36,075	36,076.00 & above
5	<16,234.00	16,235.00	24,353.00	32,470.00	35,717.00	32,471-42,211	42,212.00 & above
6	<18,594.00	18,595.00	27,893.00	37,190.00	40,909.00	37,191-48,347	48,348.00 & above
7	<20,954.00	20,955.00	31,433.00	41,910.00	46,101.00	41,911-54,483	54,484.00 & above
8	<23,314.00	23,315.00	34,973.00	46,630.00	51,293.00	46,631-60,619	60,620.00 & above
FOR FAMILY UNITS WITH MORE THEN 8 MEMBERS, ADD \$4,720.00 for HS and \$5,192 for ECEAP, for each additional member							
III. DISABILITIES:							
<u>Early Head Start</u>				<u>Head Start/ECEAP:</u>			
Part C (ESIT) Eligible w/ IFSP 95 Pts.				IEP/504b or ESIT/IFSP 95 Pts.			
IFSP evaluation in process 85 Pts.				IEP/504b evaluation in process 85 Pts.			
Suspected disability/concern 75 Pts.				Suspected disability/concern 75 Pts.			
IV. Priority Service Integration:							
Homeless: _____				400 Pts.			
Prior EHS Child: _____				400 Pts.			
History of or Current CPS Involvement/Family Assessment Response (FAR): _____				400 Pts.			
Guardian/ Kinship/Foster/Adopted: _____				400 Pts.			
History of or Current Domestic Violence: _____				400 Pts.			
Opioid addiction parent/child: _____				400 Pts.			
Expelled from early learning program due to behavior: _____				300 Pts.			
Teen Parent: _____				300 Pts.			
Past or present incarceration of a parent: _____				300 Pts.			
Past or present drug/alcohol rehabilitation of a parent: _____				300 Pts.			
TANF: _____				200 Pts.			
SSI: _____				200 Pts.			
Deployed military parent: _____				100 Pts.			

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Resides in Nooksack/Mt. Baker school district: _____	100 Pts.
English Language Learner: _____	100 Pts.
<small>*Child or primary caregiver is non-English speaking or has limited English skills</small>	
Maternal/Paternal Depression: _____	100 Pts.
Social Service Referral: _____	100 Pts.
<small>*Written referral or documented phone call from social service or educational professional</small>	
Health Referral/Mental health concerns (child): _____	100 Pts.
<small>*Written or documented telephone call from Health professional</small>	
Currently Receiving Services at the Opportunity Council: _____	6 Pts.

V. ADDITIONAL FACTORS include:

Migrant worker
 Disability- Parent/Guardian
 No support system
 No transportation
 Guardian less than 10th grade education
 Child development concerns
 Parent/guardian in the military
 Health referral/Medical/Mental health concerns (parents)
 Parent/guardian unemployed
 Past Involvement with HS/ECEAP/EHS
 Premature birth or low birth weight (<5.5 lbs.)
 Substance abuse (Non-opioid)
 Not fully immunized and not exempt

OTHER FACTORS:

[MR] Multiple Factors	(> 5)		100 Pts.
[QR] Four Factors	(4)		80 Pts.
[TR] Three Factors	(3)		60 Pts.
[DR] Dual Factors	(2)		40 Pts.
[SR] Single Factor	(1)		20 Pts.

Each February, the proposed Selection Criteria for the upcoming program year are presented to Policy Council. Incorporating Policy Council feedback, the Eligibility Criteria are updated and then presented at the March combined meeting of Policy Council and the OC Board of Directors for review and approval before submission with the rest of the next program year's grant proposal.

Program Options

Table 1: Number of Slots per Funding Model

<i>Funding</i>	<i># Part Day Slots (3 - 4.5 hours)</i>	<i># Full Day Slots (6 hours)</i>	<i># Working Day Slots (8 - 12 hours)</i>
ECEAP	18	135	21
HS	116	104	0

When fully enrolled and staffed, ELAFS has 22 total preschool classes at 17 sites across Whatcom County, with coverage concentrated in major population centers. There are six full-day Head Start classes and eight full-day ECEAP classes, six part-day Head Start classes and one part-day ECEAP class.

In addition, there are 21 working day ECEAP slots that have traditionally been subcontracted to licensed community childcare providers. At the time of this writing, 16 of these slots are in

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transition to our Mt. Baker center to be operated by OC/ELAFS, and five remain at Generations Early Learning and Family Center.

Table 2: Breakdown of Head Start and ECEAP Sites

<i>Site</i>	<i>HS/ECEAP</i>	<i># of Classes</i>	<i># of Slots</i>	<i>Model</i>	<i>Bus?</i>	<i>Enrollment (2/1/2023)</i>
Alderwood	HS	1	16	full day	yes	closed
Birches	ECEAP	1	18	full day	no	18
Birchwood	ECEAP	1	18	full day	no	closed
Blaine	ECEAP	1	18	full day	no	closed
Everson	HS	2	34	part day	yes	34
Generations	ECEAP	1	5	working day	no	5
Heather Commons	ECEAP	1	18	full day	no	17
Irene Reither/Meridian	HS	1	16	full day	yes	9
Irene Reither/Meridian	ECEAP	1	12	full day	yes	6
Kellogg	ECEAP	2	36	full day	no	35
Isom/Lynden	ECEAP	1	15	full day	no	15
Mt. Baker (Deming)	HS	1	18	full day	yes	open PY 2023-24
Mt. Baker (EWRRC)	HS	1	18	full day	yes	18
Mt. Baker (EWRRC)	ECEAP	1	16	working day	yes	open Spring 2023
Parkview	ECEAP	1	18	part day	no	closed
Roosevelt	HS	2	32	part day	yes	PM 16, AM closed
Silver Beach	HS	1	18	full day	no	17
Sumas	HS	1	18	part day	yes	18
Sunnyland	HS	2	32	part day	yes	AM 16, PM closed
W. County	HS	1	18	full day	no	17

Classes are held four days per week (Tuesday through Friday) at all sites except those providing working day care (Generations and soon Mt. Baker ECEAP). Although transportation is available for several sites, our enrollment team estimates that approximately 20 families declined to enroll this program year due to lack of transportation to their preferred site.

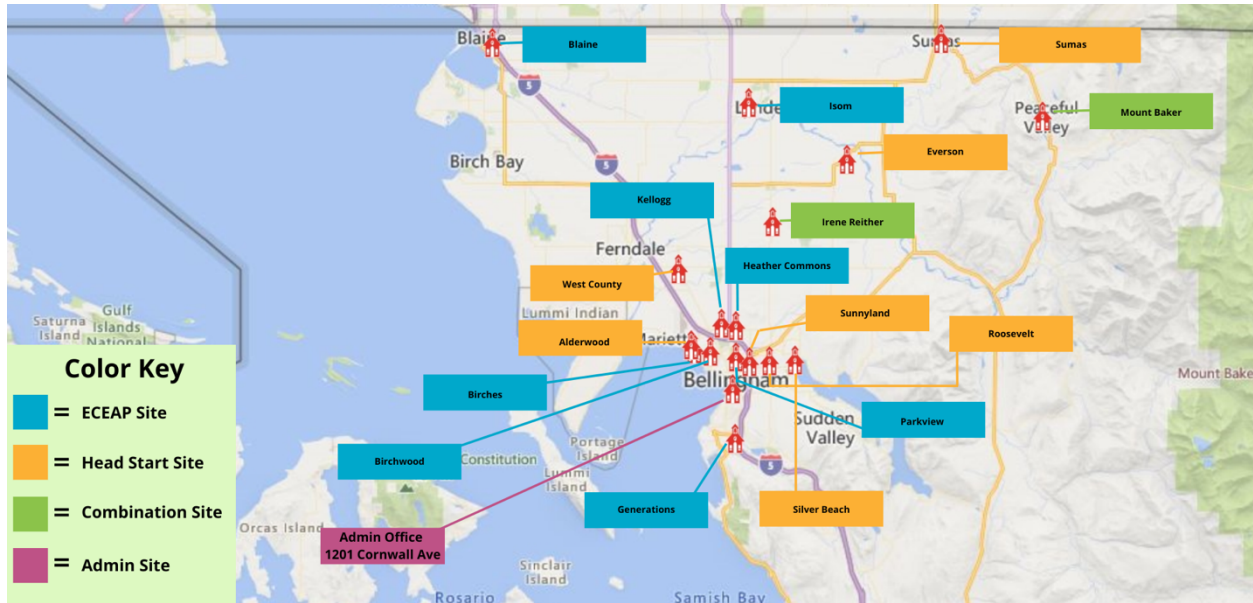
The bulk of our preschool sites are housed in school district buildings. Additionally, two ECEAP classes are on-site in Bellingham Housing Authority apartment complexes (Birches and Heather Commons) and Mt. Baker Head Start/ECEAP is located the East Whatcom Regional Resource Center, which is operated by Opportunity Council.

All 50 Early Head Start slots are home-based, with EHS Home Educators traveling throughout Whatcom County, and socialization groups offered regularly at central locations.

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The maps below show where our preschool sites are located geographically in Whatcom County, as well as where our Head Start, ECEAP, and Early Head Start families reside.

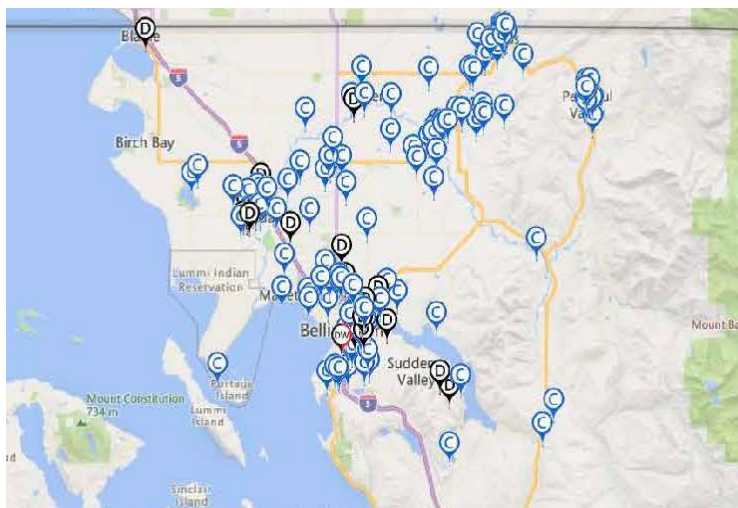
Figure 2: ELAFS Preschool Locations in Whatcom County



ELAFS program participation throughout Whatcom County for Head Start, ECEAP, and Early Head Start is further mapped out via participant's home addresses in the figure(s) included on the next page.

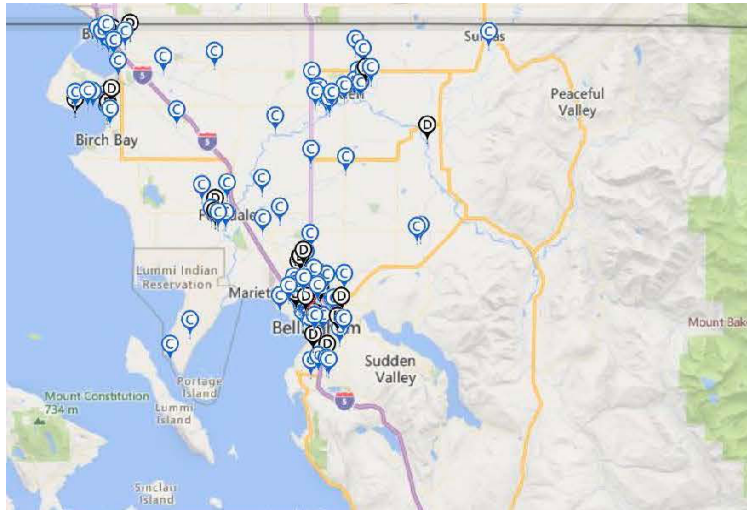
Figure 3: Home Address of ELAFS Program Participants by Program

2021-22 HS Participation by Home Address

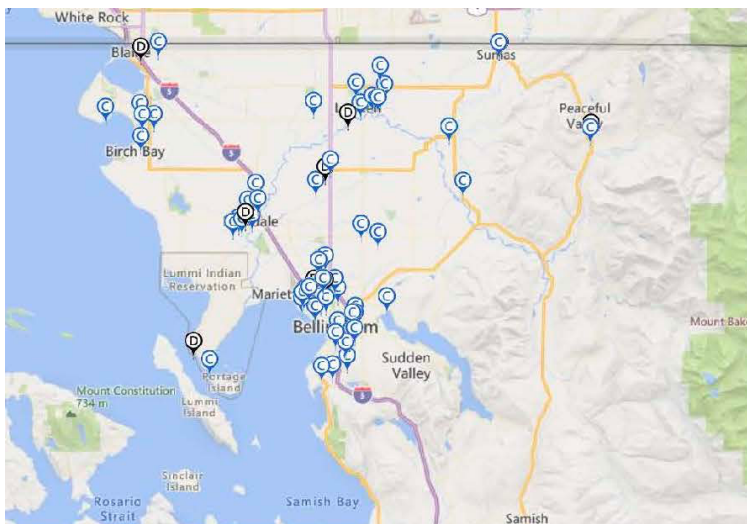


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2021-22 ECEAP Participation by Home Address



2021-22 EHS Participation by Home Address



Funded vs. Cumulative Enrollment

ELAFS is currently funded for 394 preschool slots (220 for Head Start and 174 for ECEAP), and 50 slots for Early Head Start. However, like many programs, we have experienced challenges in enrollment since the Covid-19 pandemic. Fewer families are applying for services and we have less staff available to meet those needs. The implementation of countywide transitional kindergarten (TK) has created additional challenges (which will be explored more fully in the *Education* section of this report).

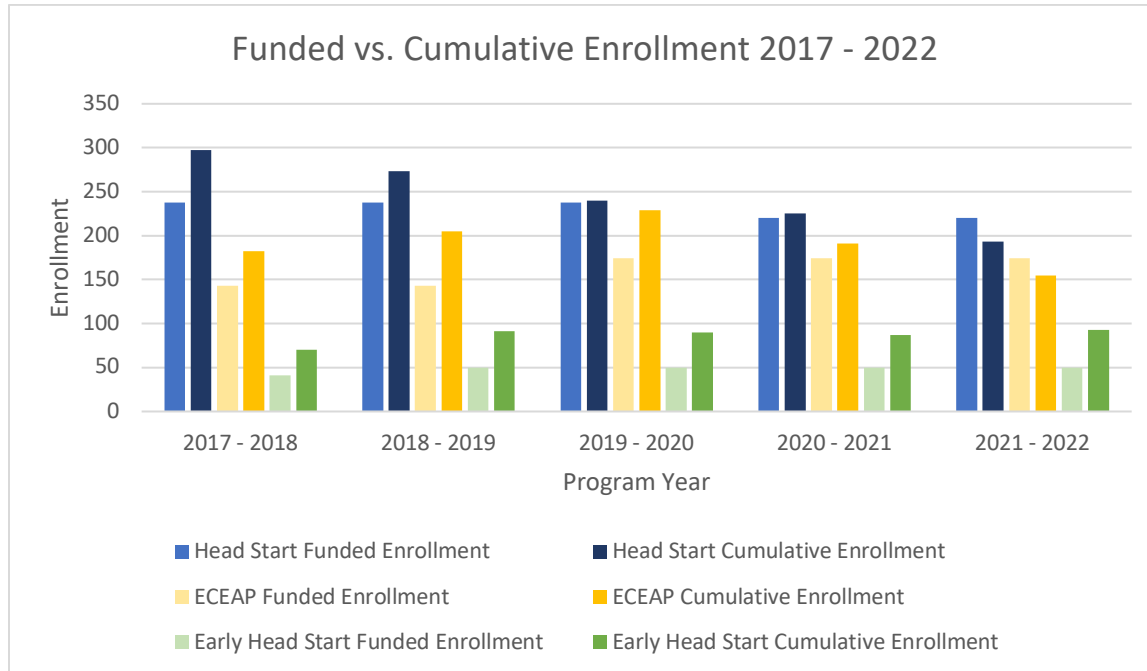
As demonstrated by the chart below, our preschool enrollment numbers have yet to fully bounce back since Washington's statewide school closure on March 13, 2020. However, Early Head

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Start has continued to stay fully enrolled and maintain a waitlist during the pandemic and beyond.

Figure 4: ELAFS Funded and Cumulative Enrollment 2017 - 2022

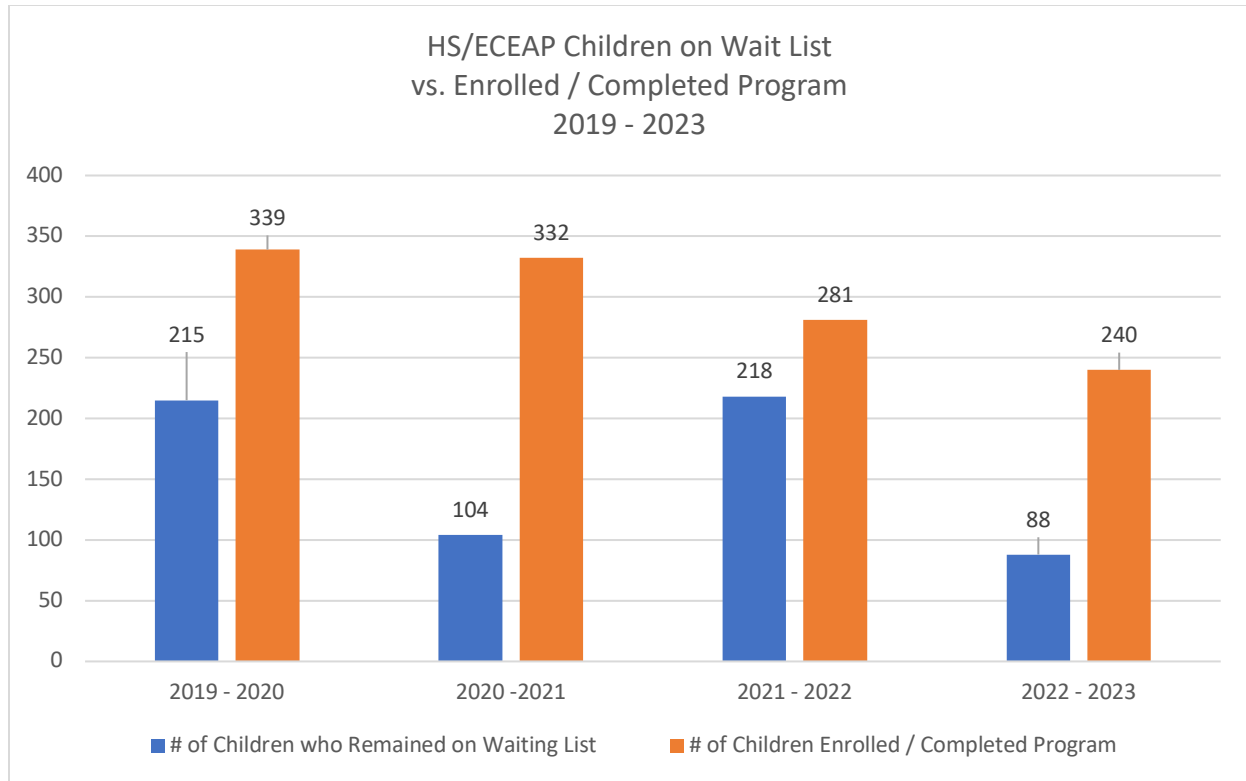


Preschool

While historically our preschool program (both Head Start and ECEAP) has always been fully enrolled and maintained a robust waiting list, lower enrollment numbers and staff shortages have prevented us from being able to re-open or keep open all of our preschool sites in recent years. For the 2022-23 school year, we have consolidated staffing and shifted students from Alderwood Head Start and Birchwood, Blaine, and Parkview ECEAP sites to other locations to ensure continuity of services for families. Additionally, Roosevelt, Sunnyland, Irene Reither and Mt. Baker are each only running one of their two classes.

As of 2/1/2023, we are fully enrolled in all preschool classrooms that are currently open. The current waitlist is 88, but many of these families are over income, have three-year old children that we can't accept because we don't have enough four-year olds at their preferred site, are in locations where our center is closed due to staffing, or have not responded to calls (and may be enrolled in another program such as TK). Some centers have larger waiting lists than others, which our ERSEA Specialist reports is normal and depends on location within the county.

Figure 5: Head Start and ECEAP Children Waitlisted vs. Enrolled



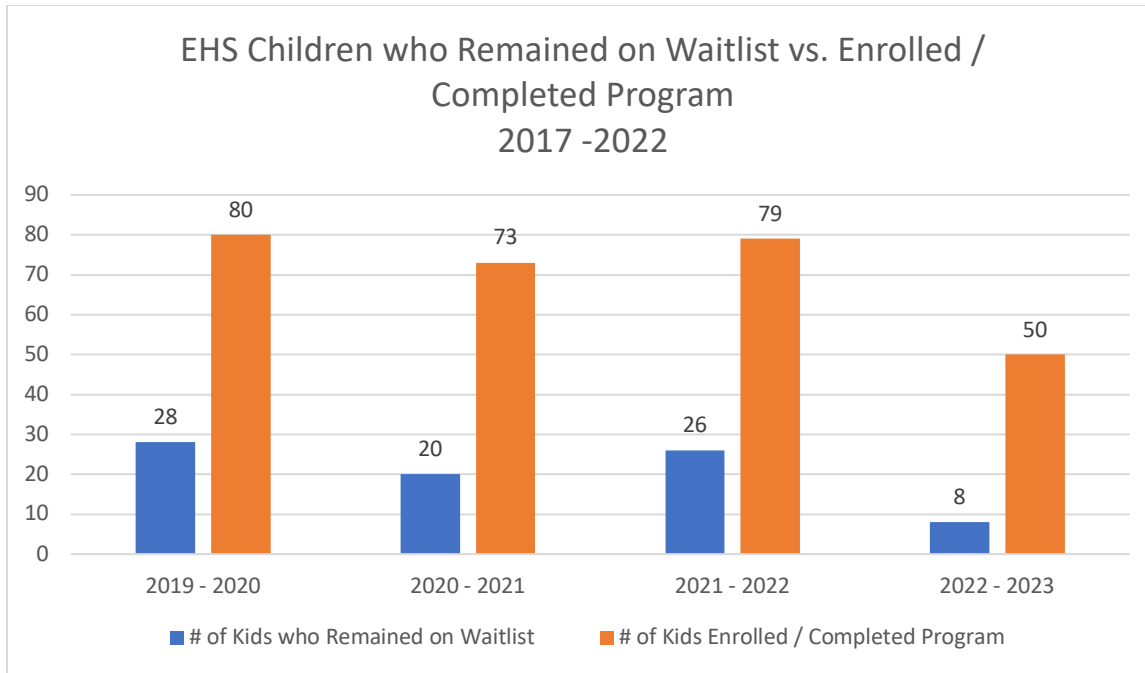
Anecdotally, our recruiting team and other staff share many stories of families choosing TK over Head Start or ECEAP. Reasons often cited have to do with the transportation, five-day school week, ease of enrollment, and a one-stop drop for all of the family's children.

Early Head Start

Over the last five program years, Early Head Start has had an average cumulative enrollment of 86 children, well over the 50 funded slots. Thanks to a successful pivot to a hybrid-visiting model, EHS was able to continue serving families over the course of the pandemic and is the only program that did not see a cumulative enrollment drop in the 2021-22 program year.

On average, each EHS home educator at Opportunity Council carries a caseload of 10-12 families. Our EHS program is currently fully enrolled with eight families on the waitlist. Similarly to preschool, the last several years have seen a marked decrease in the number of families on the waitlist for EHS.

Figure 6: Early Head Start Children Waitlisted vs. Enrolled



Disabilities

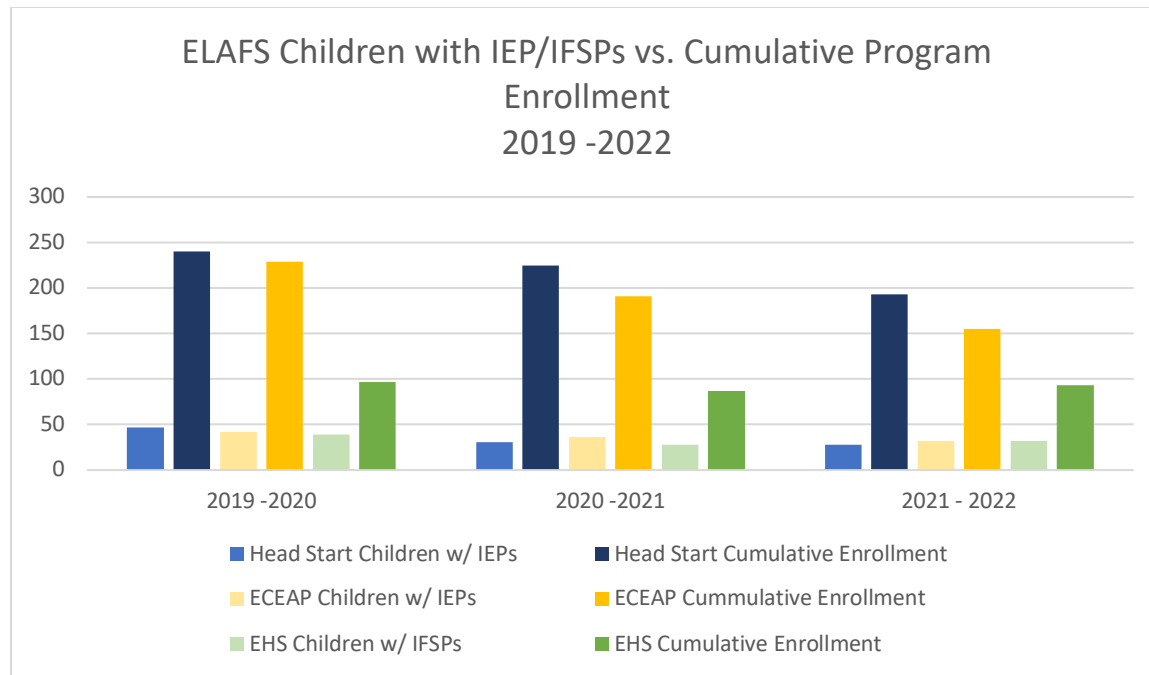
Head Start, ECEAP, and EHS are required to have at least 10% of their enrollment be children receiving support under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The table below indicates the number of children enrolled in each program over the last three years who had either an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP).

Table 3: ELAFS Children Receiving Disability Support by Program

	<i>Head Start (IEP)</i>	<i>ECEAP (IEP)</i>	<i>EHS (IFSP)</i>
2019-20	47	42	39
2020-21	31	36	28
2021-22	28	32	32

The next chart compares the numbers of enrolled children with IFSPs or IEPs against each program's cumulative enrollment for 2019-22.

Figure 7: ELAFS Children Receiving Individualized Supports vs. Cumulative Enrollment



In the last three years, no program has fallen below the 10% requirement; rather, in several instances, ELAFS preschool programs have been at double that number. EHS meanwhile regularly uses approximately one third of their annual enrollment slots for children with IFSPs.

Table 4: Percentage of Enrolled Children Receiving Individualized Supports

	% of Head Start Children w/ IEPs	% of ECEAP Children w/ IEPs	% of EHS Children w/ IFSPs
2019 – 2020	20%	18%	40%
2020 – 2021	14%	19%	32%
2021 – 2022	15%	21%	34%

Cultural and Linguistic Features of Enrolled Children and Families

The charts on the next page detail the racial and ethnic background of enrolled children, as well as the primary language spoken at home, based on Program Information Report (PIR) data from the 2021-22 program year.

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Figure 8: Race and Ethnicity of ELAFS Families

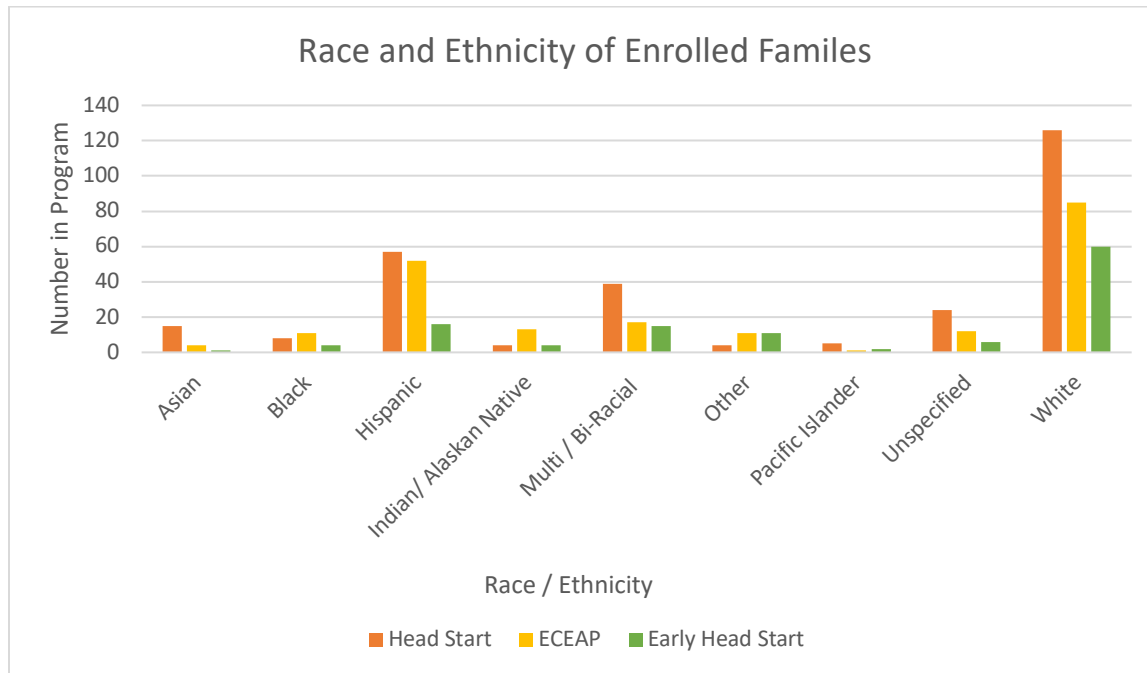
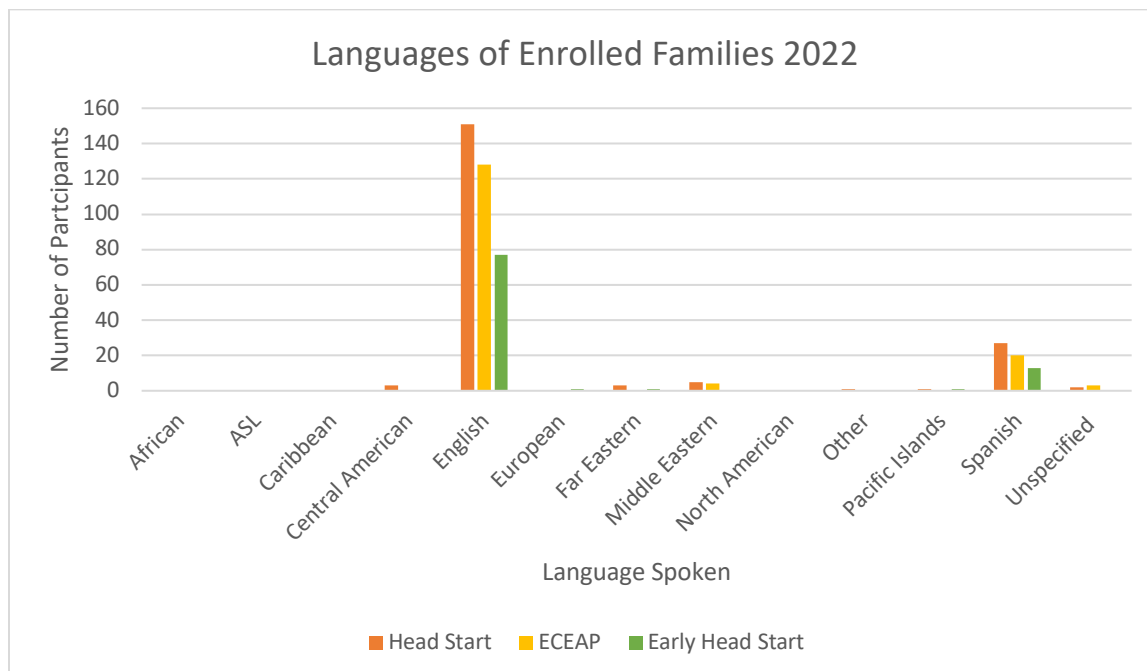


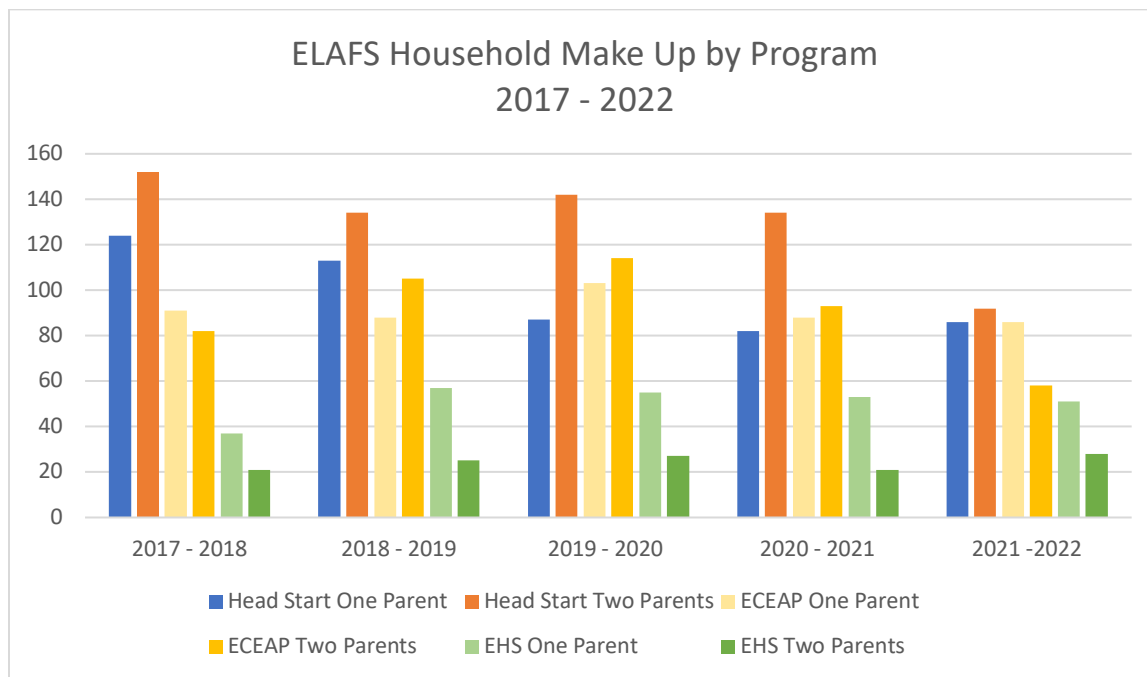
Figure 9: Languages of ELAFS Families 2022



Household Makeup of Enrolled Children and Families

Over the past five years, the majority of Early Head Start families have been and continue to be single-parent households. 2021-22 saw more single-parent than two-parent households in ECEAP for the first time in recent years, and a much smaller gap between the two in Head Start.

Figure 10: ELAFS Household Make Up by Program



Last program year (2021-22), 2.8% of our preschool students had a grandparent as their primary adult (9 total children), 2.2% were in foster care (7 children), and 1.3% were being raised by non-relatives or relatives other than grandparents (4 children). The remaining 94% listed the child's primary adult as biological/adoptive/step-parent.

Figure 11: Head Start Children's Relation to Primary Adult

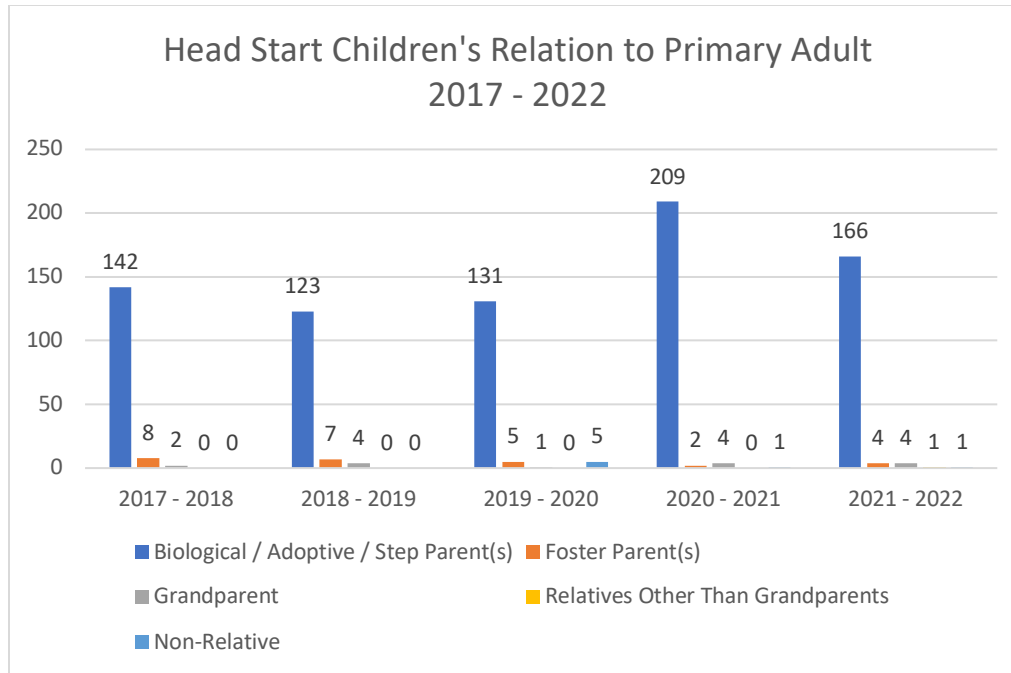
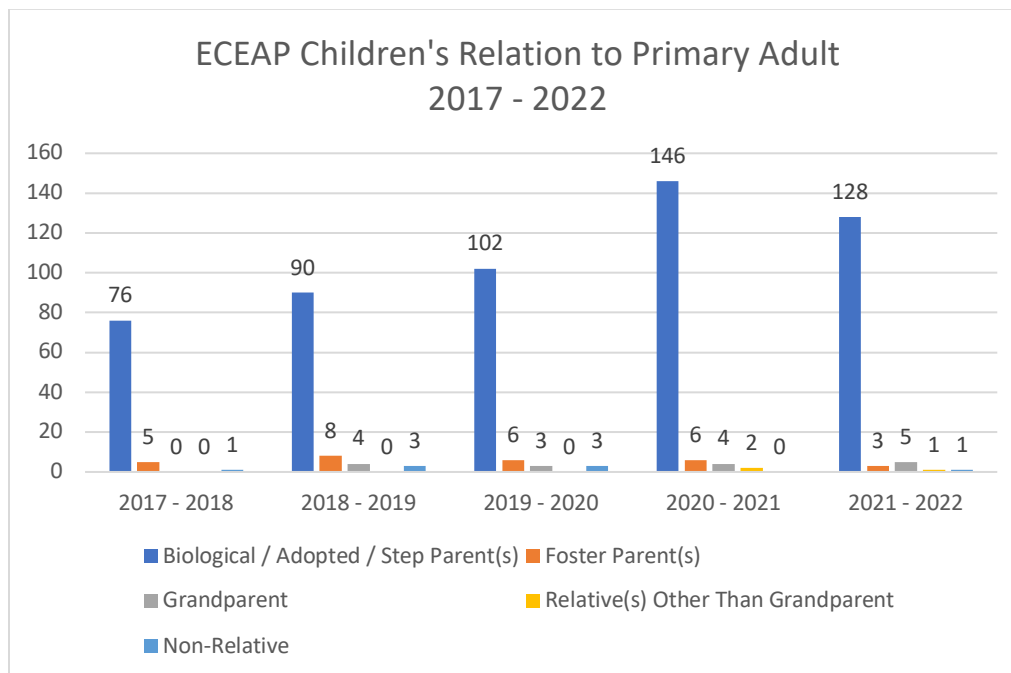


Figure 12: ECEAP Children's Relation to Primary Adult

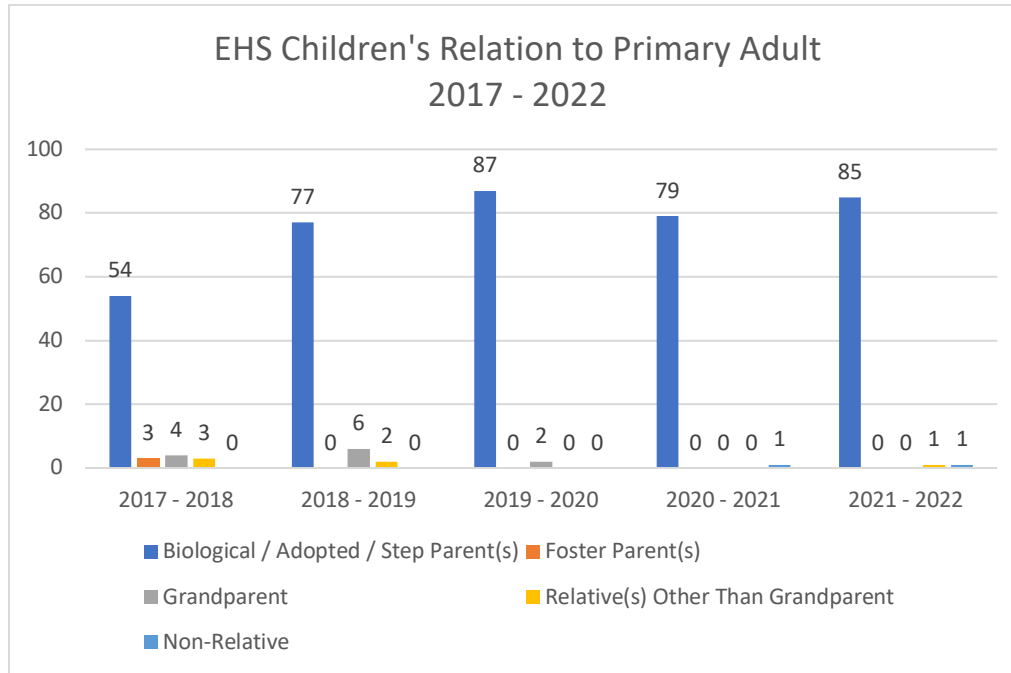


Likewise, for EHS during the same time, two enrolled children were being raised by relatives other than grandparents or non-relatives, and none were in foster care or being raised by

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grandparents. The remaining 95% listed the child's primary adult as biological/adoptive/step-parent.

Figure 13: Early Head Start Children's Relation to Primary Adult



Data Collected and Findings

Demographics

ELAFS' Head Start, Early Head Start and ECEAP programs serve all of Whatcom County, which is located in the northwest corner of Washington state and comprises just over 2,107 square miles. Of the county's total population, 13.8% (or 30,832 residents) are at or below poverty level and 16.6 % of these (or 1,674) are children under age five.¹

While the general population of Whatcom County is steadily growing, this growth would seem to be driven more by people relocating to Whatcom rather than a steady increase of children being born here. In the last five years, Whatcom County's crude birth rate experienced a slight dip falling from 10.0 births per 1,000 people in 2017 to 8.8 births per 1,000 people in 2019 per the Department of Health. This rate held at 8.8 in 2020. While the Department of Health has not yet released birth rate data for 2021, we can use the data provided in the 2021 American Community Survey (ACS) to estimate the crude birth rate. This equation is included below:

Equation 1: Birth Rate per 1000 People

$$\frac{\text{Births in a Year}}{\text{Estimated Population}} \times 1000 = \text{Birth Rate per 1,000 People}$$

Therefore,

Equation 2: 2021 Whatcom Birth Rate per 1000 People

$$\frac{2085}{228831} \times 1000 = 9.1 \text{ Births Per 1,000 People in 2021}$$

Using crude birth rates from the Department of Health and data from the ACS about the population of Whatcom County that falls below poverty level, the basic principles of the formula above can estimate the number of children who were born to families living below the poverty line.

Equation 3: Estimated Births to Families in Poverty per 1000

$$\frac{\text{Population Below \% of Poverty Level}}{1000} \times \text{Birth Rate} = \text{Estimated Births to Families below Poverty Levels per 1,000}$$

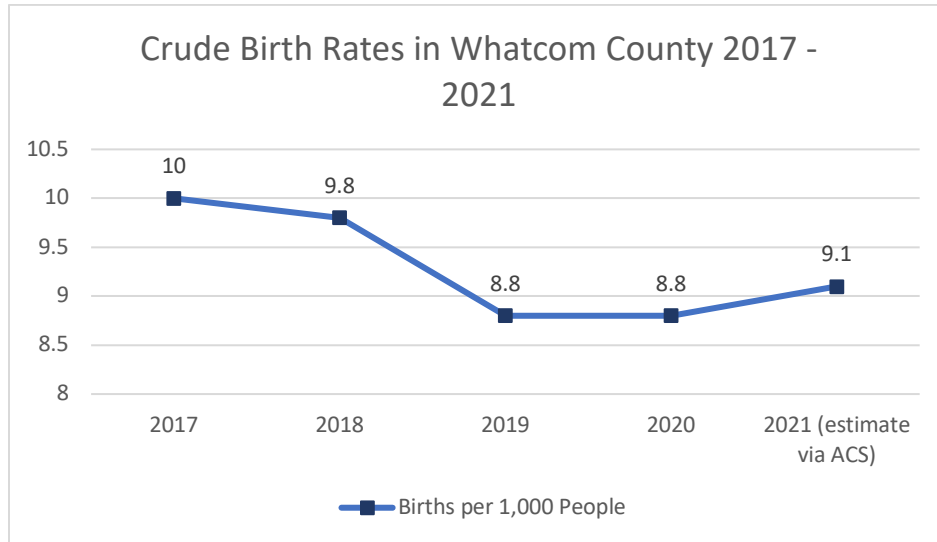
This formula in practice, calculating births to families below 50% of the poverty level, looks like this:

Equation 4: Estimated Births to Whatcom County Families in Poverty per 1000 in 2021

$$\frac{15637}{1000} \times 9.1 = 142.297 \text{ per 1000 people born below 50\% of Poverty Level in 2021}$$

Using these formulae, we are able to illustrate Whatcom County's birth trends in the following section. The first chart tracks the crude birth rates in Whatcom County from 2017 to 2021.

Figure 14: Whatcom County Crude Birth Rates 2017 - 2021

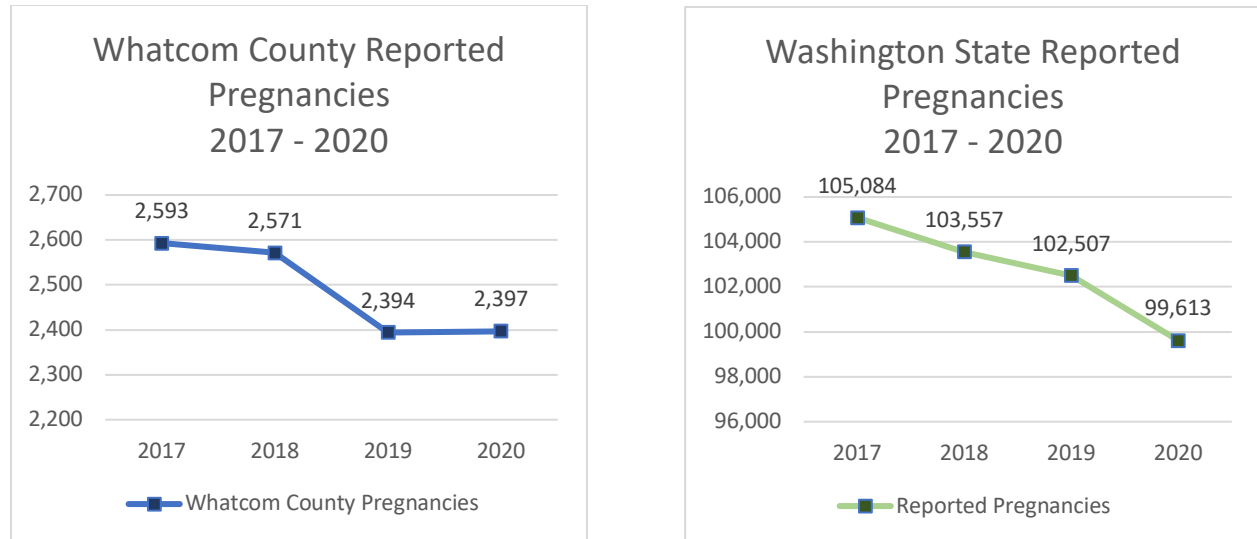


While our estimates show a trend upwards in 2021, moving from 8.8 to 9.1, the birth rate overall has decreased compared to where it was at the time of the last community needs assessment.

According to data gathered again by the Department of Health, Whatcom County's actual number of reported pregnancies has gone down in recent years—from 2,593 in 2017 to 2,397 in 2020 (a decrease of 7.6%). Washington as a whole saw a decrease in reported pregnancies in this period as well, falling 5.7% from 105,084 in 2017 to 99,613 in 2020. At time of reporting, the Department of Health has not yet released reported pregnancy data for 2021; we are unable to estimate this metric as the required data is also not available via the ACS as it was with reported births.

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Figure 15: Whatcom County and Washington State Reported Pregnancies 2017 - 2020



One notable indicator is the decline in teen pregnancy in Whatcom County over the past five years. The Department of Health reports that teen pregnancy has gone from 74 total instances in 2017 to 44 reported teen pregnancies in 2020. Data for births in Whatcom County to mothers between the ages of 10-14 were too low to be reported on in the last five years. We can assume that 2021 would continue this trend as the ACS lists births to women between the ages of 15-19 as zero with a margin of error of 213, signifying a very low measure for the year. The table below shows teenage birth data for Whatcom County.

Table 5: Age of Whatcom County Mother's from Department of Health 2017 - 2020

	Year of Birth			
Age of Mother	2017	2018	2019	2020
10-14	0.0	Not Reported	Not Reported	Not Reported
15-17	16	0	14	17
18-19	58	51	51	27

While birth rates have declined in the last five years, Whatcom County continues to see a significant percentage of children born to families who report their income as being below the poverty level. In 2020, Whatcom County had 2,003 total births; using the second equation listed at the start of this section, we can estimate that of these births, roughly 22.6% of them were to families that fell below 125% of the federal poverty level.

The following table breaks down births in Whatcom County and uses the Department of Health's crude birth rate to estimate the number of children born to low-income families.

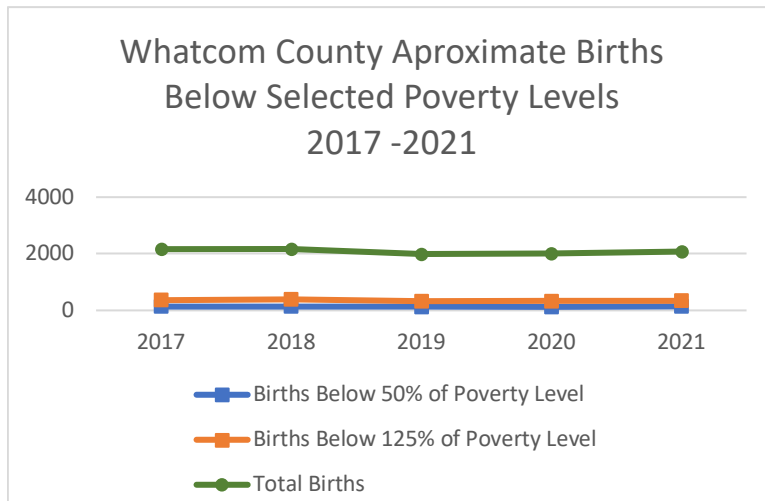
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Table 6: Estimated Whatcom County Births Below Poverty Level(s) from Department of Health

Year	Crude Birth Rate per 1,000	Total Births	Births to Families Below 50% of Poverty Level per 1,000	Births to Families Below 125% of Poverty Level per 1,000
2017	10.0	2,164	139.40	371.05
2018	9.8	2,161	139.581	389.442
2019	8.8	1,992	123.842	326.031
2020	8.8	2,003	124.634	327.263
2021	9.1	2,085	142.297	341.578

For further context, the following chart compares estimated births to low-income families with the overall births in Whatcom County for that year.

Figure 16: Whatcom County Approximate Births Below Selected Poverty Levels from Department of Health 2017 - 2021



Again, the data suggests that, while Whatcom County's birth rate may have fallen in recent years, the number of children born to families who could benefit from our services remains steady.

Racially, Whatcom County's population is primarily White. The table below lists the racial demographics of Whatcom County according to 2020 census data.³

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Table 7: 2020 Whatcom County Population by Race/Ethnicity from 2020 U.S. Census

	<i>Total #</i>	<i>% of Population</i>
<i>Whatcom County Total Population</i>	226,847	-
White alone	175,946	77.6%
Black or African-American alone	2,347	1.0%
American Indian or Alaskan Native alone	6,277	2.8%
Asian alone	10,127	4.5%
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander alone	725	.3%
Other race alone	9,692	4.3%
Two or more races	21,733	9.6%

While the vast majority of all households in Whatcom County at or below the Federal Poverty Level are White due to the much larger overall number of White residents, households of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) residents are represented at disproportionately higher percentages.

Table 8: Race/Ethnicity Percentages of Families below Poverty Level from 2020 U.S. Census

	<i>White alone</i>	<i>Black or African American alone</i>	<i>American Indian and Alaska Native alone</i>	<i>Asian alone</i>	<i>Some other race alone</i>	<i>Two or more races</i>
% of All Families Below Poverty Level	6.0%	20.2%	13.6%	9.3%	22%	16.4%

As seen in the table below, 88.1% of Whatcom County residents speak English only, while 11.9% speak a language other than English. This represents a slight decrease in other languages spoken since ELAFS' 2017 CNA, which reported 87.6% of Whatcom County residents as speaking English only and 12.4% speaking a language other than English. 29% of those that speak a language other than English at home report that they speak English less than "very well".

Table 9: Whatcom County Language Spoken at Home Population 5 Years and Over from 2021 ACS

	<i>Total #</i>	<i>% of Population</i>
Population 5 years and over	212,781	
English only	187,437	88.10%
Language other than English	25,344	11.90%
Speak English less than "very well"	7,313	3.40%
Spanish	13,056	6.10%
Speak English less than "very well"	3,734	1.80%
Other Indo-European languages	6,309	3.00%
Speak English less than "very well"	1,867	.90%
Asian and Pacific Islander languages	5,108	2.40%
Speak English less than "very well"	1,485	.70%
Other languages	871	.40%
Speak English less than "very well"	227	.10%

Population and Relocation

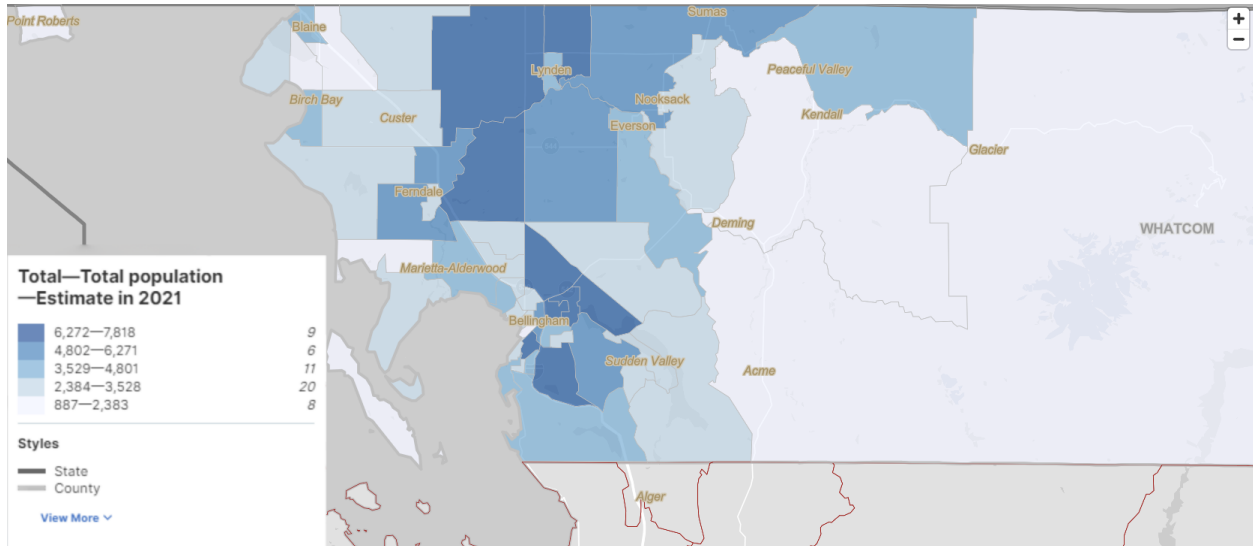
Over the last five years, Whatcom County's population has spread outward from comparatively densely populated urban centers like Bellingham, Blaine and Ferndale into more rural

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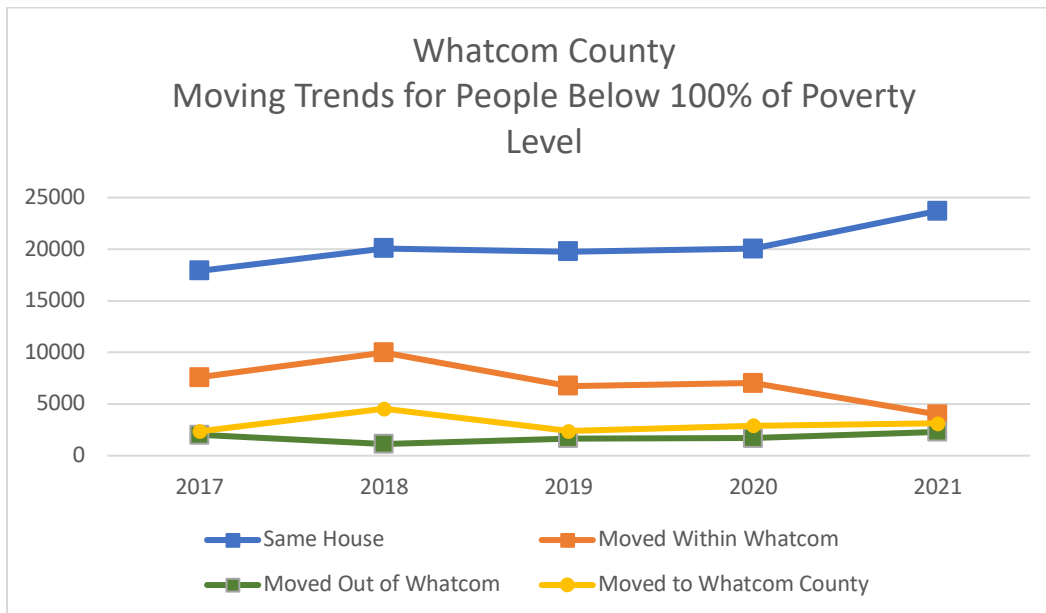
surrounding areas.

Figure 17: Total Population Estimate for Whatcom County 2021 from 2021 ACS



For people below the poverty level, trends over the last five years show more are moving *to* and *within* Whatcom County than moving *away*.

Figure 18: Moving Trends for Whatcom Residents Below Poverty Level 2017 - 2021 from ACS

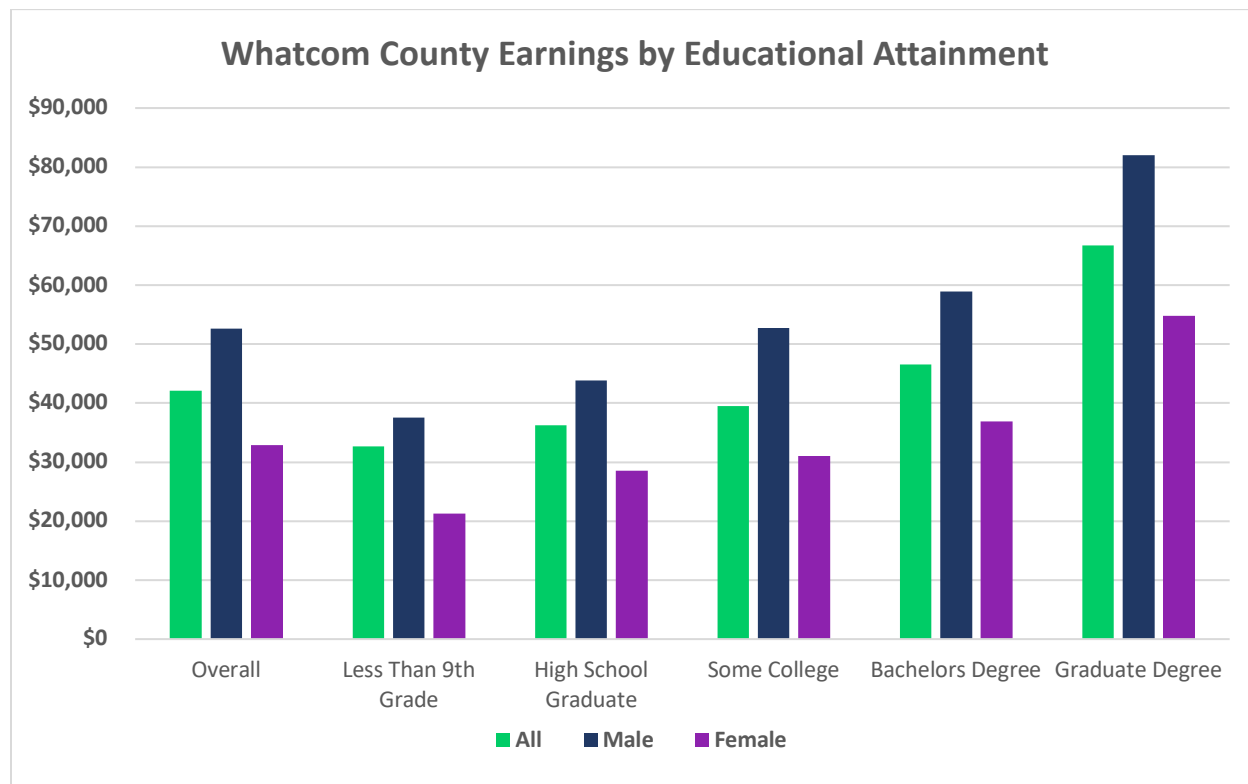


It seems clear that Whatcom County will continue to have a large population of people who are income eligible for our services moving forward and that, perhaps more crucially, the distance between the people requiring those services is growing as people spread out further into the county.

Social and Economic Status

Educational attainment level is often a predictor of social status. In 2021, 93.2% of Whatcom County residents had a high school degree or higher, and 36.4% had a bachelor's degree or higher. The 2020 mean earnings compiled for residents of Whatcom County by educational attainment level were as follows:³

Figure 19: Whatcom County Earnings by Level of Educational Attainment from U.S. Census 2020 ACS



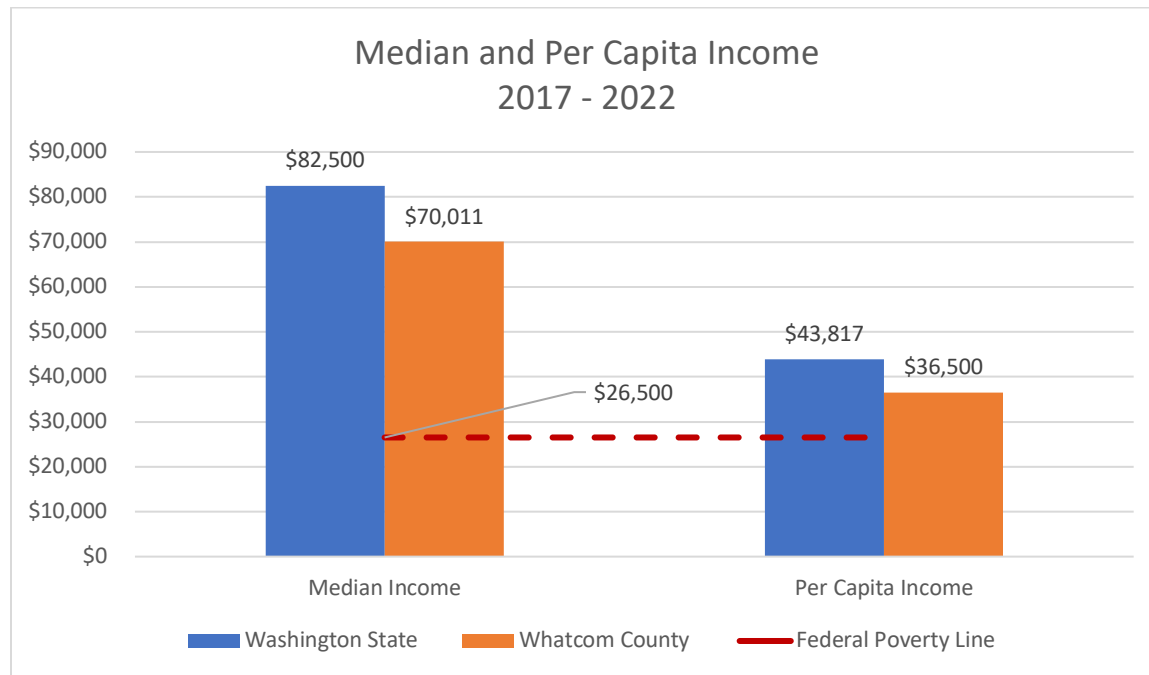
The data above starkly contrasts the gap between men's and women's earning power (regardless of education), as well as significant differences in educational attainment by race. While 77.9% of White residents of Whatcom County have their high school diploma, that number is significantly lower for residents who are Hispanic (49.8%), Black (58.8%), Native American (65.2%), Asian (59.3%), or two or more races (58.1%).

In 2021, 48.1% of Whatcom County households with a female head of household and no spouse present reported an annual income below the federal poverty level, giving Whatcom County 10.2% more single mother households in poverty in 2021 than Washington State as a whole (37.9%). Data for the same situation with male householders was not recorded.

For additional context, in 2021 the FPL was \$26,500 for a family of four. For Washington, the State Median Income for 2017-21 was over three times that (\$82,400); Whatcom County, despite being much smaller and more rural than some of its more metropolitan counterparts in the state,

has only a slightly lower median household income for the same period (\$70,011). Per capita income for 2017-21 trends similarly: \$43,817 statewide vs. \$36,504 for Whatcom County.

Figure 20: Median vs. Per Capita Income for Whatcom County and Washington State 2017 - 2022 from 2021 US ACS



Housing

According to the Washington Center for Real Estate Research, the median cost to purchase a home in Whatcom County in 2022 was \$597,700. (Five years ago, in 2017, that number was \$350,600.⁴) Assuming a homeowner puts 30% of their income towards housing* and has been able to make a 20% down payment, they would still need to have a household income of \$71/hour to afford the cost of a slightly below median price (\$565,000) home.⁵

Area renters face an equally challenging landscape. Whatcom County’s Cascadia Daily News reported that “52% of renting households in Whatcom County and 58% in Bellingham spent more than 30% of their income on rent and utilities.”⁶ This is significantly higher than the statewide average of 46%.

In 2021, the average apartment rent in Bellingham was \$1,311 per month. Statewide, the apartment vacancy rate for Washington dropped from 4.2% in 2020 to 3.6% in 2021. During the same time span, the apartment vacancy rate for Bellingham dropped from 1.5% to 1%. In a highly competitive “landlord’s market” such as this, those with housing vouchers or any marks against their rental record (such as a previous eviction or low credit score) are at a significant disadvantage.

**HUD advises that households should pay no more than 30% of their monthly income on housing related costs in order to avoid being “cost-burdened”. Cost-burdened families/households may have difficulty affording necessities such as food, clothing, transportation, and medical care.*

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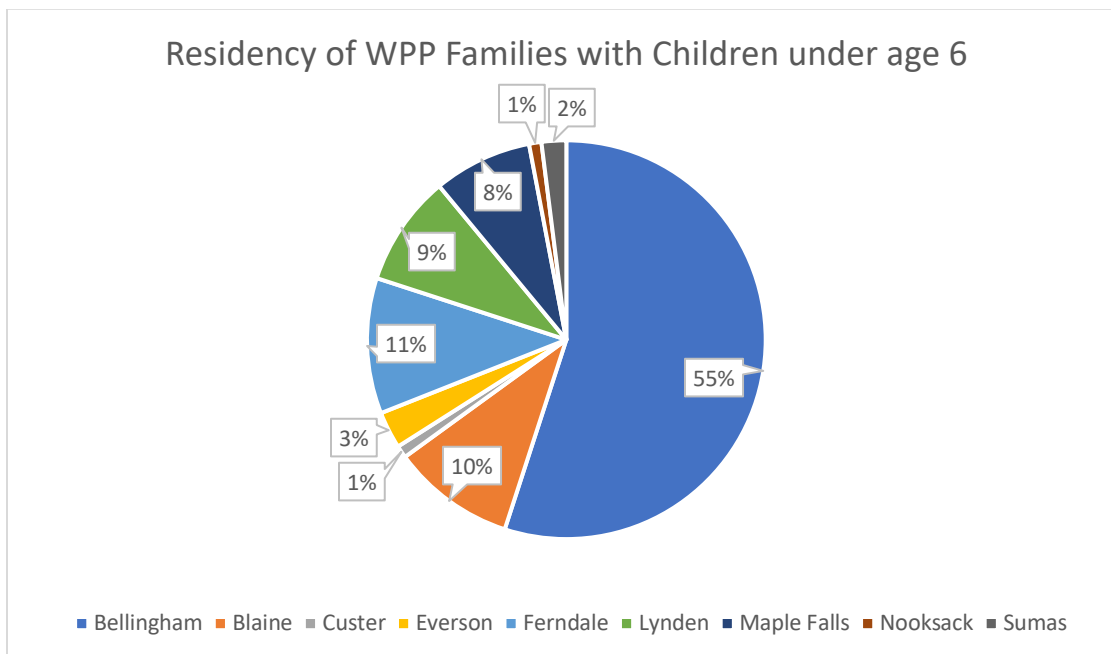
Table 10: Whatcom County Housing Characteristics from 2021 ACS

Total Housing Units	101,865
Occupied Housing Units	92,219
Vacant Housing Units	9,646
Homeowner Vacancy Rate	1.0
Rental Vacancy Rate	2.0
Units that lack complete plumbing facilities	337
Units that lack complete kitchen facilities	963
Median Mortgage	\$2,059
Monthly owner costs > 30% of household income	14,163
Median Rent	\$1,347
Gross rent > 30% of household income	18,345

Information on the strengths and needs of Head Start-eligible children and families can be gleaned from the most recent (June 2021) update to the Opportunity Council's Community Needs Assessment called the *Whatcom Prosperity Project*⁷, a client-intercept report of residents in Opportunity Council's local three-county region. Overall, 68% of respondents were from Whatcom County, 12% from Island County, and 21% from San Juan County. Of 716 total client households, 119 of these had young children under age six. Though not a large population sample, this can provide us with some insight into the strengths and needs of the population we serve.

Over half of these 119 client households are in Bellingham, the major population center of Whatcom County.

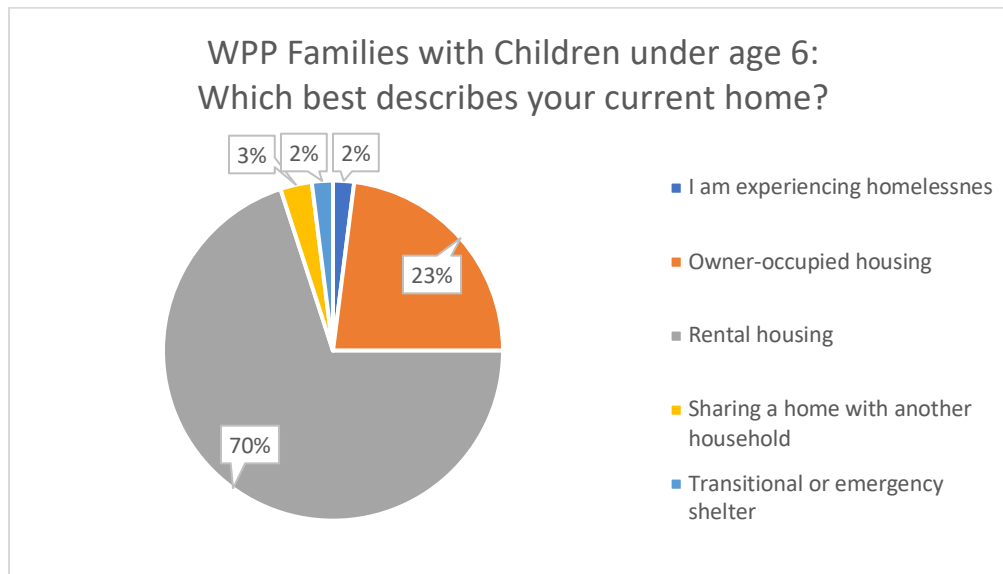
Figure 21: Residency of WPP Families with Children Under Six from Whatcom Prosperity Project



A key finding in the WPP is that “affordable housing has been consistently rated over many years as very important and difficult to access.” The data bears that out, with almost three quarters of client households surveyed living in rental housing (70%), and just 23% owning their

own home. 7% of households reported that they are either currently experiencing homelessness, in transitional or emergency shelter, or sharing a home with another household (“doubled up”).

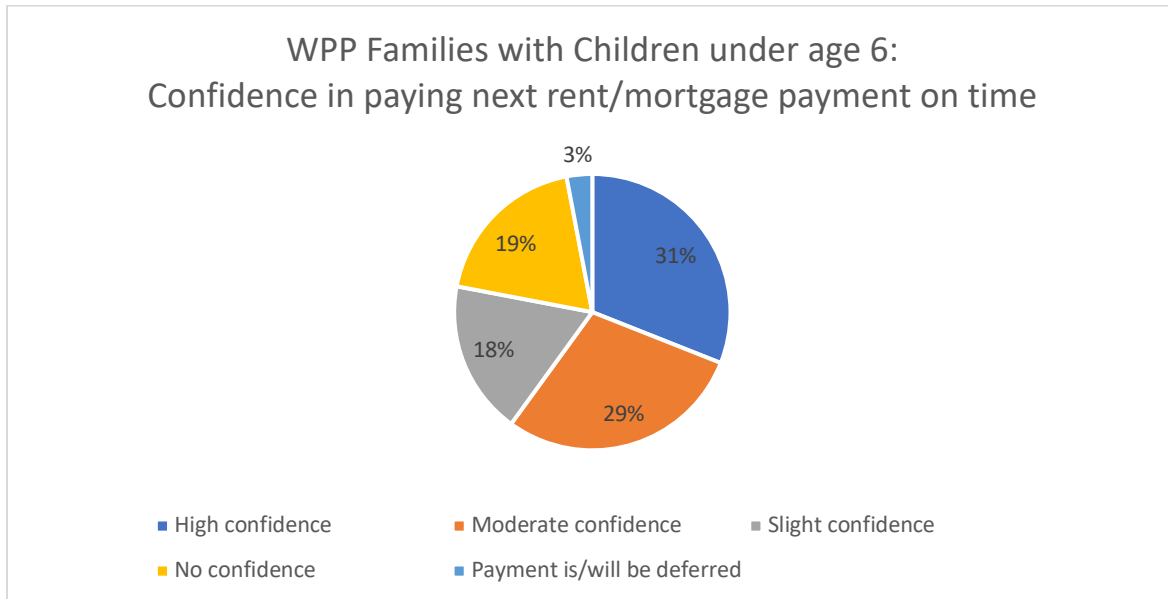
Figure 22: Housing Situation for WPP Families with Children Under Six from Whatcom Prosperity Project



Less than one third (31%) of respondents expressed high confidence in being able to make their next rent or mortgage payment on time. A slightly smaller percentage (29%) expressed moderate confidence, but over one third (37%) expressed slight or no confidence.

The WPP report notes that their respondents “expressed less confidence in their ability to pay housing costs when compared to statewide findings of the Census Pulse Survey (12% said ‘no confidence’ vs. 4% of Washingtonians)”. That number is even higher (14%) for BIPOC respondents. Unknown at the time of this writing is what the impact will be of cessation of federal rental assistance funds that were widely available during the pandemic.

Figure 23: WPP Families with Children under Six Confidence in Making Next Housing Payment on Time from Whatcom Prosperity Project



Employment

According to the 2021 American Community Survey, 60.9% of Whatcom County households with children under the age of six have both parents involved in the workforce.

In October 2022, industry employment was as follows⁸:

Table 11: Whatcom County Employment by Industry from 2021 ACS

Total Private	78,600
Total Nonfarm	96,500
Mining, Logging, and Construction	8,300
Manufacturing	9,800
Private Service Providing	60,500
Trade, Transportation and Utilities	16,700
Financial Activities	4,000
Professional and Business Services	9,000
Leisure and Hospitality	10,700
Government	17,900

In 2020, the five largest employers in Whatcom County were⁹:

Table 12: Whatcom County Five Largest Employers

1.	St. Joseph's Hospital	3,116
2.	Lummi Nation	2,083
3.	Western Washington University	2,060
4.	Bellingham Public Schools	1,606
5.	BP Cherry Point	975

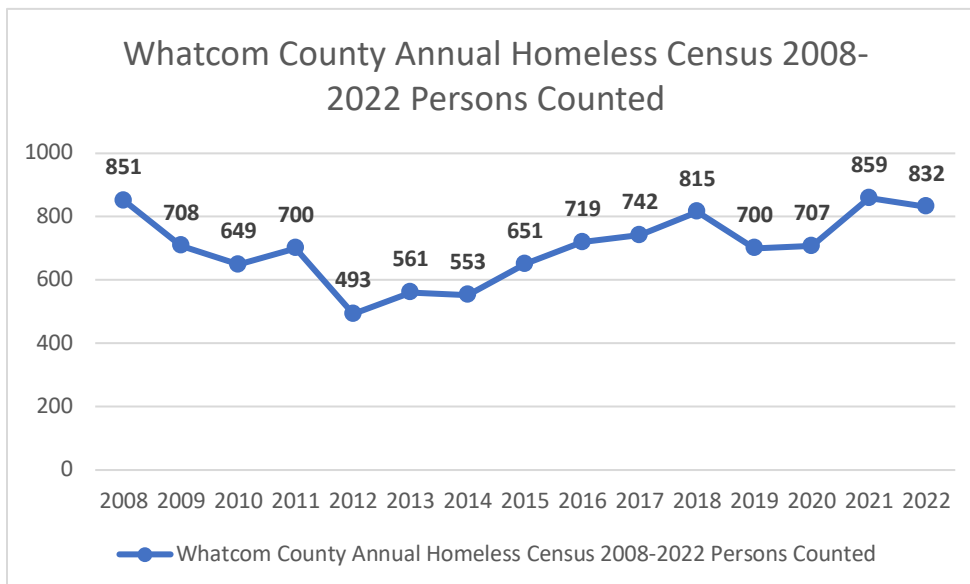
Although Whatcom County's 2021 unemployment rate of 6.0% has come down significantly since reaching a record high of 17.4% in April 2020, it is still higher than it was prior to the pandemic (5.1% in 2019). Labor force numbers have yet to fully rebound, as well; the Washington State Employment Security department reports an average annual civilian labor force of approximately 3,000 fewer residents in 2021 compared to 2019.

Over half (58%) of families with children under age 6 who participated in the Whatcom Prosperity Project survey reported that they had experienced a loss of employment since Covid shutdowns took effect in March of 2020, and 65% reported that they had not worked for pay or profit in the past seven days.

Unsheltered Children

According to the Whatcom County Coalition to End Homelessness, 832 individuals were considered unsheltered in 2022¹⁰. This included 639 different households in Whatcom County, which marks a 19% increase in unsheltered families since our last major community needs assessment in 2017.

Figure 24: Whatcom County Annual Homeless Census 2008 - 2022 from WCCEH



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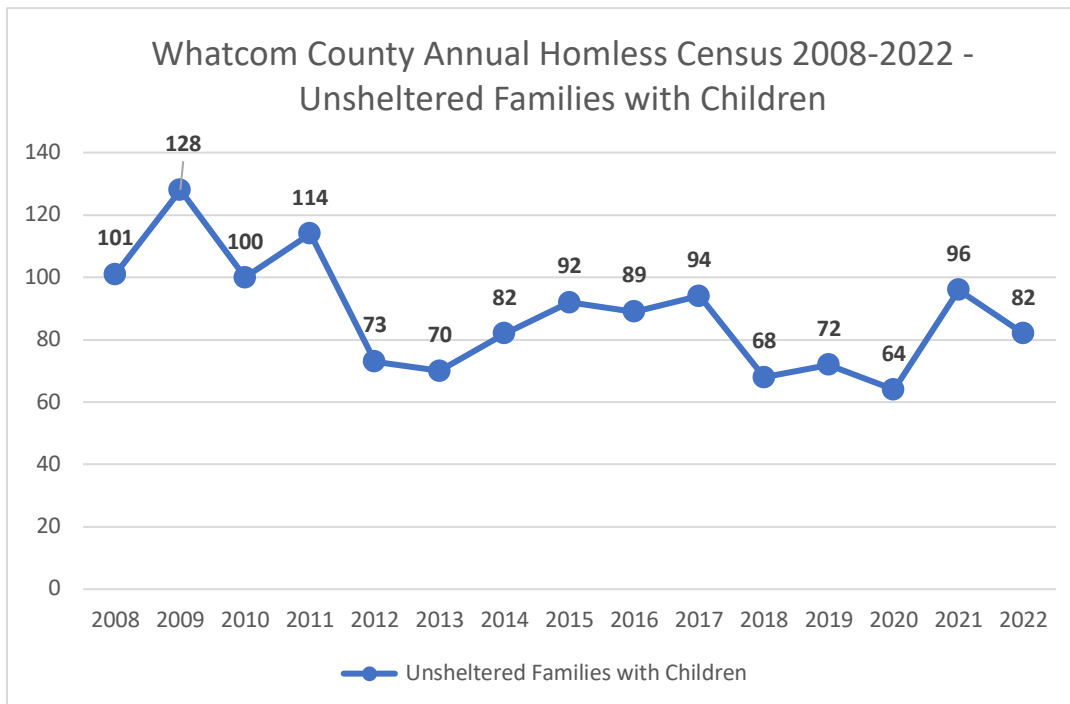
Families with children accounted for 82 unsheltered households or 13% of the total unsheltered families. Between all 832 individuals who were identified as unsheltered, 5% of them were in the age range of 0-4 years old (42 children). Children under the age of 18 meanwhile accounted for roughly 1 in 5 of all individuals counted.

Table 13: 2022 Whatcom County Unsheltered Individuals and Families

Household Type	Number of Households	% of Households
Total Individuals and Families	639	100%
Unaccompanied Individuals	539	84%
Single Parent with Children	65	10%
Adult Families without Children	18	3%
Two Parents with Children	17	3%

While the number of unsheltered families with children in Whatcom County appears to be trending generally downward, it is also apparent that the economic stressors at the height of the pandemic led to an increase in unsheltered families. The WCCEH speculates that this increase was largely due to “families feeling unsafe in doubled-up living arrangements due to Covid exposure risks, the economic downturn brought on by the pandemic, and challenges due to isolation and separation from support systems.”

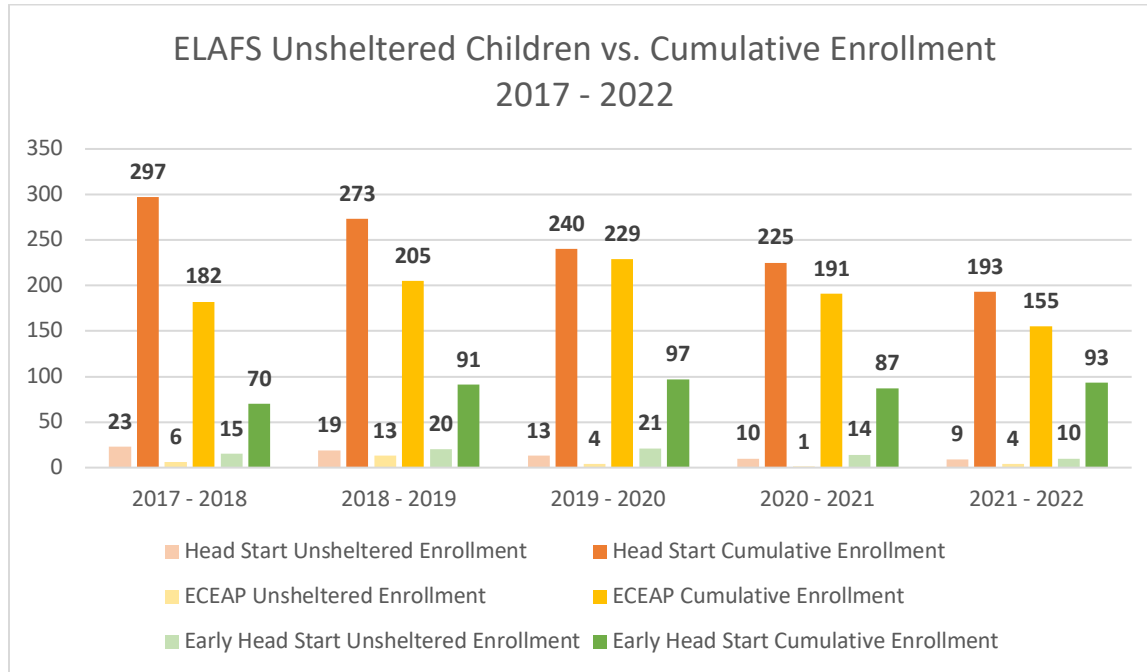
Figure 25: Whatcom County Unsheltered Families with Children



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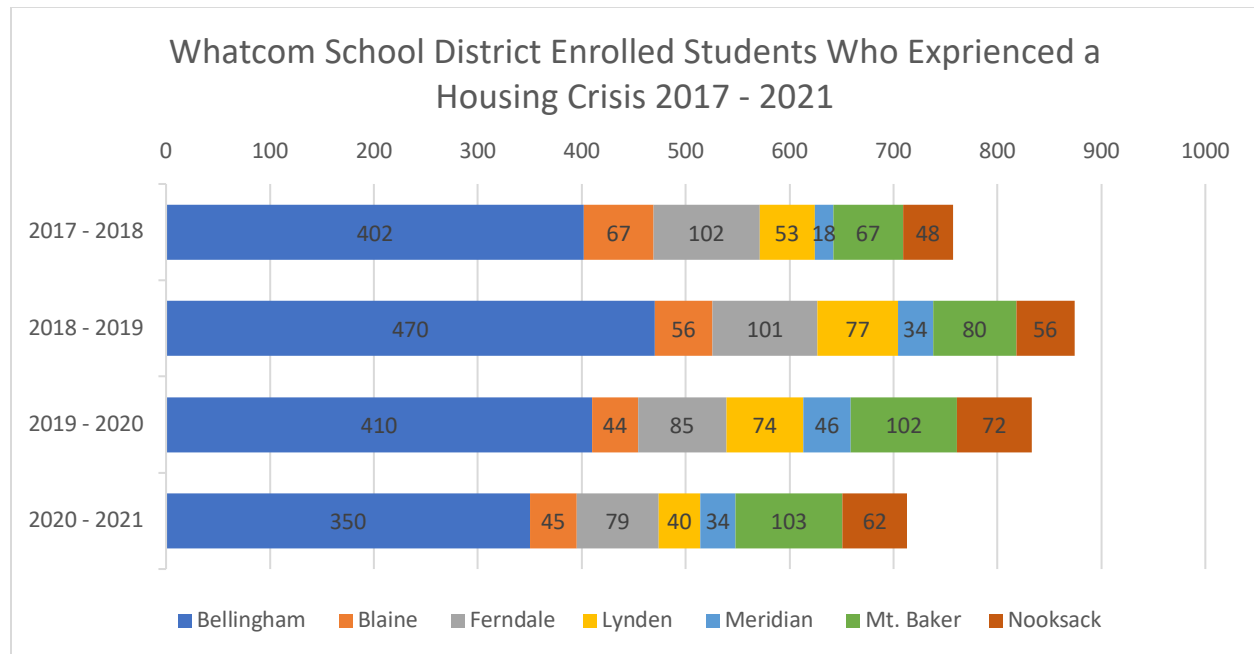
For the 2021-22 program year, ELAFS had 23 Head Start, Early Head Start, and ECEAP enrolled children who were considered unsheltered at some point in the program year. Further data of children considered unsheltered in the PIR vs. cumulative enrollment of the three major ELAFS programs over the last five program years is displayed in the next chart.

Figure 26: ELAFS Unsheltered Children vs. Cumulative Enrollment 2017 - 2022



Trends in unsheltered schoolchildren vary in different areas of Whatcom County. The numbers in the next figure represent students defined as homeless under the McKinney-Vento Act, which leads to slightly different numbers than the WCCEH's data points.

Figure 27: Whatcom Public School Students Who Experienced Housing Crises 2017 - 2021



In general, the above data displays further evidence of a downward trend in unsheltered children; however, there is a growth trend in three Whatcom County school districts considered to be more rural areas (Meridian, Mount Baker, and Nooksack school districts).

Children with Disabilities

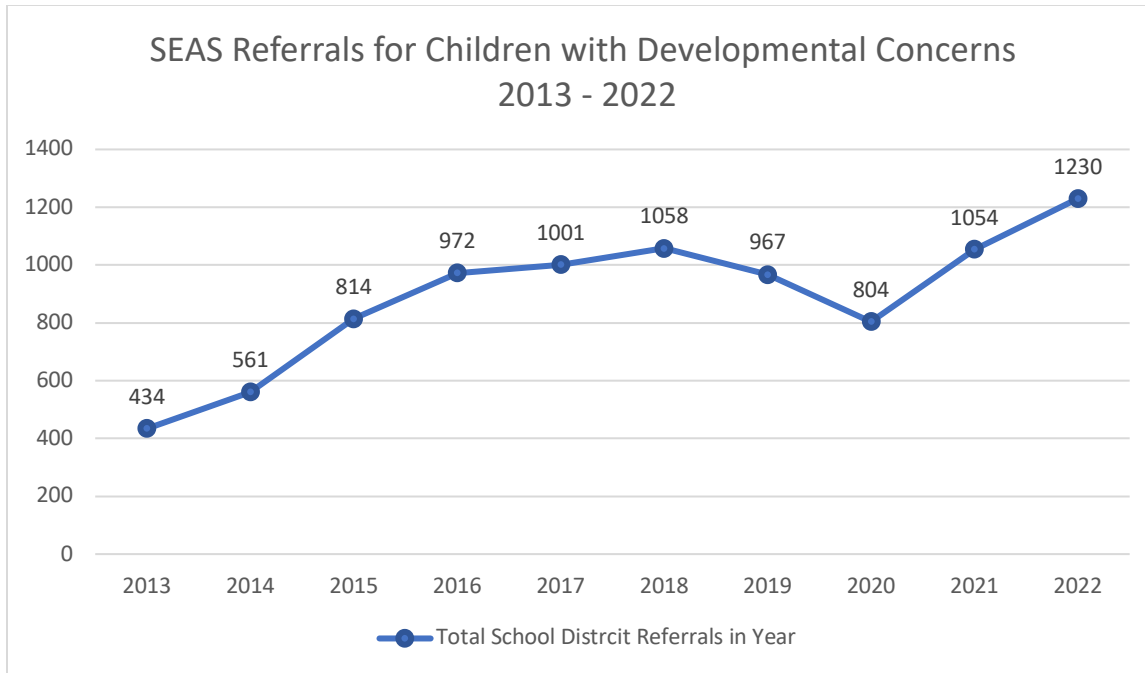
Single Entry Access to Services

Since its inception in 2013, Opportunity Council's Single Entry Access to Services (SEAS) program has tracked the number of referrals for children from birth through age 21 with diagnosed or suspected disabilities in Whatcom County. SEAS has seen steady increases in the number of referrals since then, with a peak in 2018 of 1,058. In 2019, there was a slight drop which was followed by an even bigger drop in 2020 due to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. In total, by 2020 referrals had dropped by 254 from the 2018 high, representing a 24% drop overall. Throughout 2020, families were either reluctant or unable to engage in services due to the pandemic. However, referral numbers began to increase again in 2021, and in 2022 SEAS made 1,230 referrals--representing a 35% rebound and an all-time record high number of referrals for this program.

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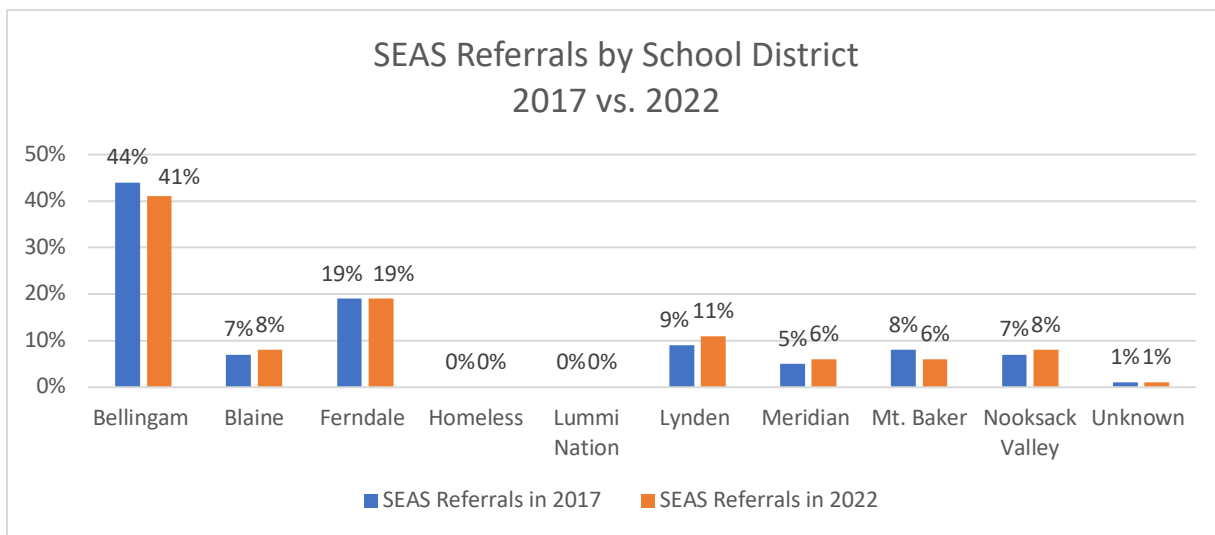
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Figure 28: SEAS Referrals for Children with Developmental Concerns 2013 - 2022



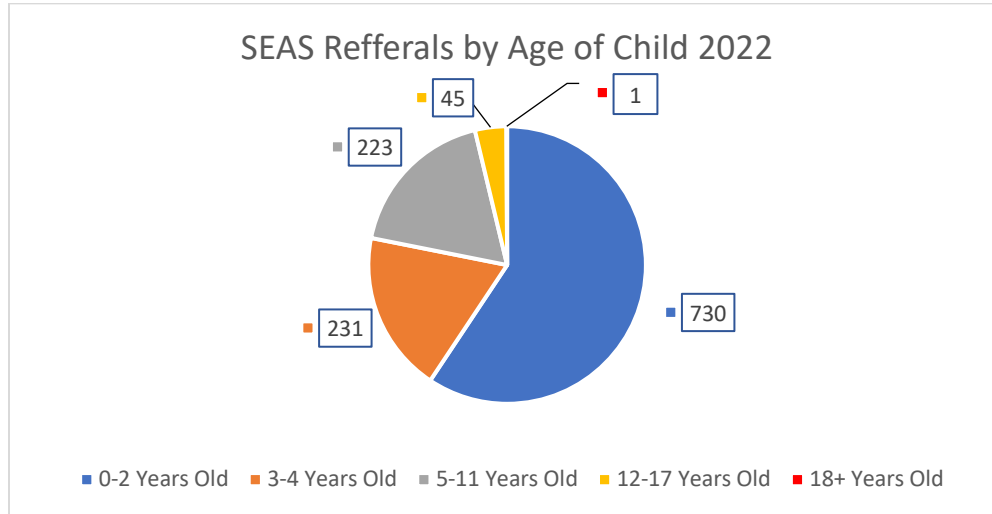
The majority of SEAS referrals for the most recent program year were made on behalf of the Bellingham (41%) and Ferndale (17%) schools districts. The remaining 42% of referrals were to more rural school districts including Lynden, Blaine, Meridian, Nooksack and Mount Baker districts. A comparative chart that includes both 2017 and 2022 data can be seen below. A trend to watch is the overall shift of disability referrals from our two most populous school districts to more rural districts.

Figure 29: SEAS Referrals by School District 2017 - 2022



A breakdown by age of SEAS referrals for children with developmental concerns for 2022 is included below.

Figure 30: SEAS Referrals by Age of Child in 2022



While the exact percentages differ from year to year, children aged 0-4 have accounted for well over half of SEAS referrals since the program's inception in 2013. Children aged 0-4 made up a combined total of 78% of all SEAS referrals in 2022 (961 children).

In 2022, the top five needs reported by SEAS were developmental evaluations (38% of all referrals), medical evaluations (17%), special needs therapies (16%), school district services (14%), and basic needs support (9% of all referrals). The breakdown of needs identified is seen in the graphic below. Please note that due to cases where multiple needs were identified, the numbers in the following chart come out to a higher sum than the total of referrals for 2022.

Figure 31: 2022 SEAS Referrals by Need

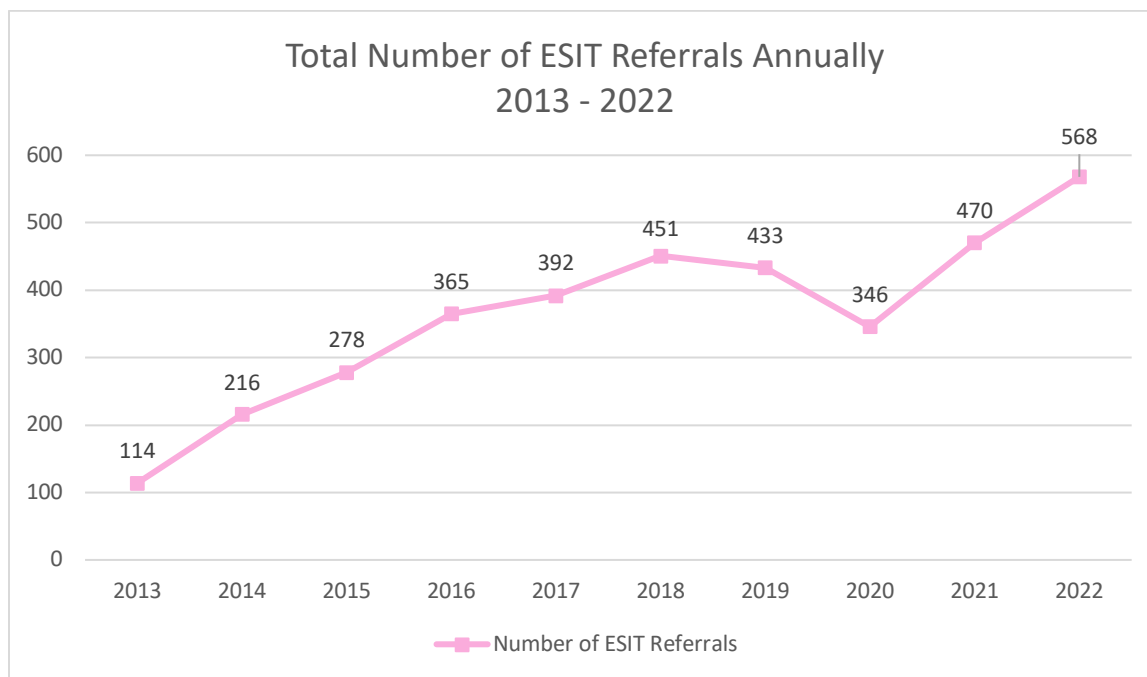


Early Support for Infants and Toddlers

Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) provides Part C special education services for children ages birth through three. As the sole pathway for families to access ESIT Part C special education services in Whatcom County, SEAS also tracks the total number of ESIT referrals made.

Similar to the total number of SEAS referrals, we see an overall drop in the number of ESIT referrals in 2020, followed by the numbers picking back up in late 2021 and hitting record levels in 2022. The timing of these drops and recoveries of referral numbers closely follows the timing of the onset of Covid restrictions and the return to in-person services.

Figure 32: Total Annual ESIT Referrals 2013 - 2022



There are three ESIT providers in Whatcom County: Opportunity Council, Whatcom Center for Early Learning (WCEL), and the Lummi Nation, which serves exclusively its enrolled members. Opportunity Council and WCEL are assigned different school districts' families, share Bellingham, and the referral goal is 40% OC/60% WCEL (with not all referrals becoming an ongoing service case). The data below, representing OC's portion of these referrals, shows a steady increase in the number of active IFSPs, as well as the number of completed evaluations. These growth trends show no evidence of slowing.

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Table 14: Opportunity Council ESIT Reporting 2020 - 2022

	2020	2021	2022
<i>Referrals received*</i>	138	188	227
<i>Range of # of monthly referrals</i>	7-18	11-19	12-25
<i>Evaluations completed</i>	159	207	243
<i>New IFSPs</i>	64	73	97
<i>Monthly average of active IFSPs</i>	136	156	181
<i># Children transitioned out of service</i>	99	103	123

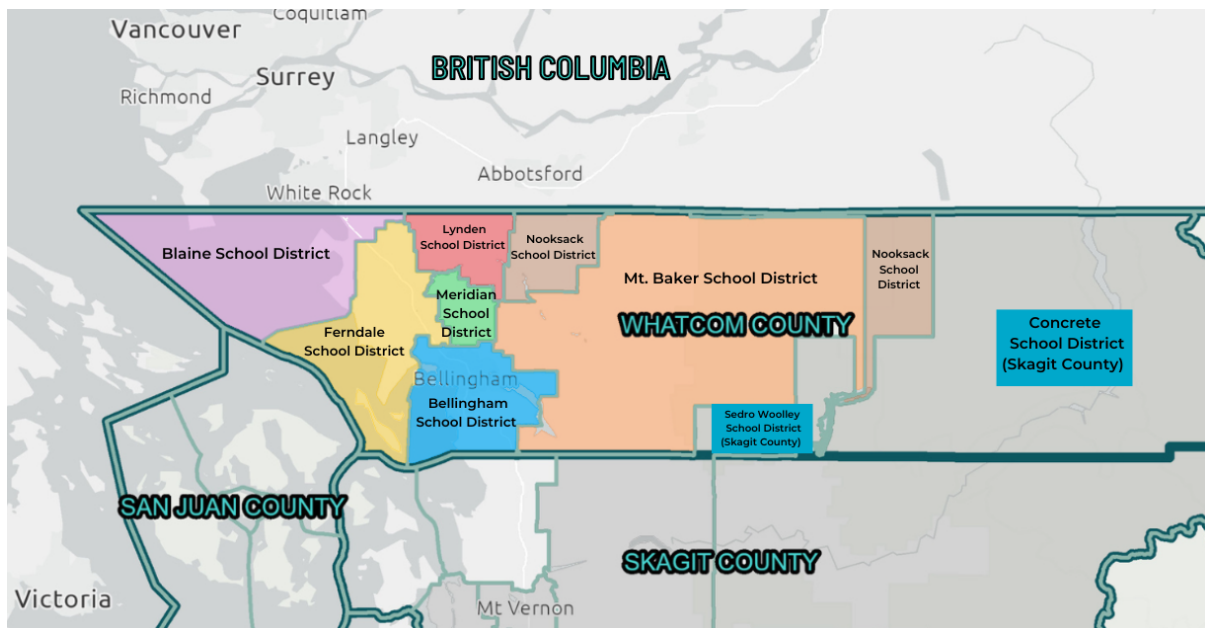
*40% of total SEAS referrals for Whatcom County

Needs of Eligible Children and their Families

Education

Whatcom County contains seven public school districts: Bellingham, Blaine, Ferndale, Lynden, Meridian, Mt. Baker, and Nooksack Valley, in addition to the Lummi Nation Department of Education.

Figure 33: Whatcom County Public School District Areas



The last five years saw enrollment county-wide peak in 2019-20; to date, none of the seven public districts has been able return to and sustain pre-pandemic enrollment levels.

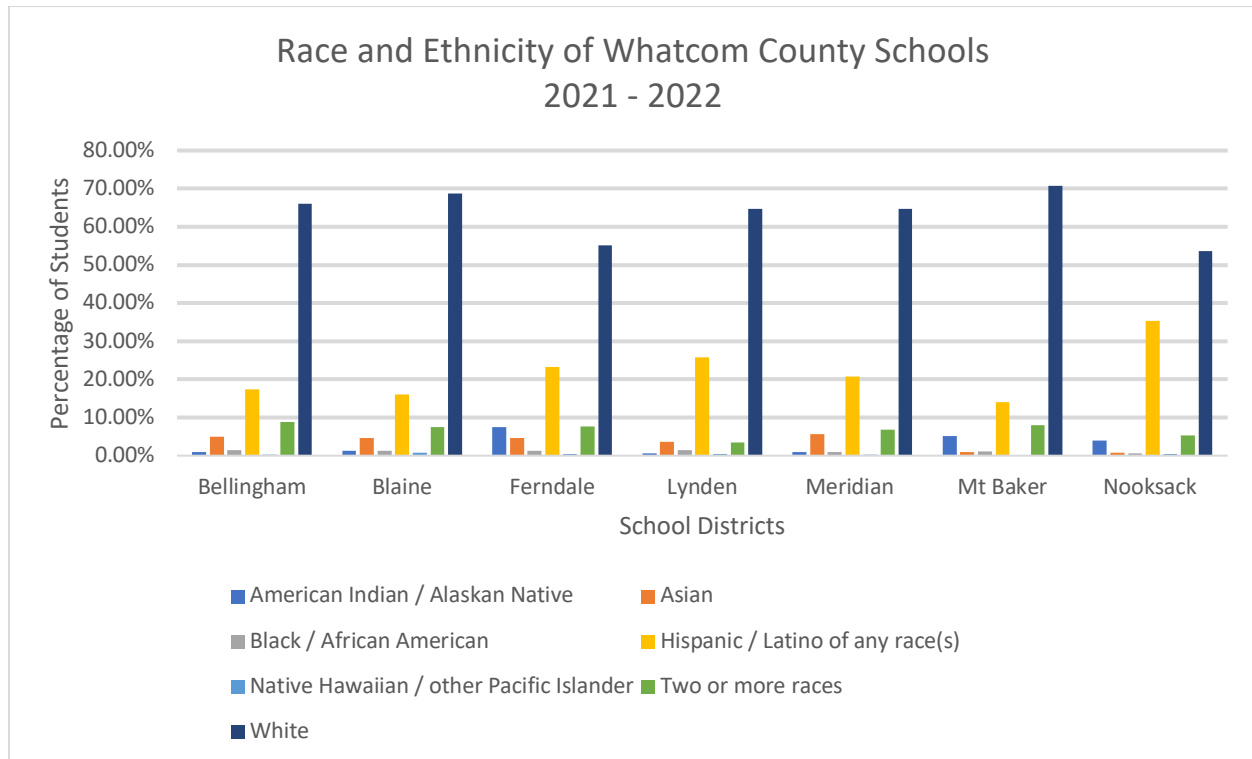
Table 15: Whatcom County Public School District Enrollment 2017 – 2022

Whatcom County School Districts Enrollment 2017 - 2022					
School District	Enrollment 21-22	Enrollment 20-21	Enrollment 19-20	Enrollment 18-19	Enrollment 17-18
Bellingham	11,500	11,548	12,052	12,068	11,901
Blaine	2,176	2,201	2,326	2,345	2,285
Ferndale	4,446	4,353	4,819	4,823	4,840
Lynden	3,443	3,233	3,590	3,481	3,282
Meridian	1,782	1,838	1,807	1,807	1,772
Mt. Baker	1,694	1,736	1,859	1,910	1,883
Nooksack	1,880	1,923	1,982	1,905	1,842

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In academic year 2021-22, 63.4% of public school families county-wide self-identified as White, compared to 66.1% in 2017-18, while those identifying as Hispanic/Latino increased from 19.6% to 21.8%. The percentage of families identifying as Black/African-American, Asian, and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander were comparable to past data, while those identifying as American Indian/Alaskan Native decreased slightly. Slight increases were reported in the percentage of those identifying as being of two or more races.

Figure 34: Race and Ethnicity of Enrolled Students in Whatcom County Public School 2021 - 2022



Additional characteristics for each school district in Whatcom County (2015-19 average) are listed below:

Table 16: Student Support Program Characteristics in Whatcom County Public Schools

	% families below poverty level	% students receiving free/reduced meals	% students with disabilities	% families of migrant laborers
Bellingham	9.40	32.3%	16.1%	1%
Blaine	19.96	47.5%	17.2%	.3%
Ferndale	10.08	43.9%	17.1%	1.3%
Lynden	7.34	34.9%	16.9%	1.7%
Meridian	9.69	33.5%	12.8%	1.9%
Mt. Baker	22.36	51.4%	20.8%	1.3%
Nooksack Valley	13.15	56%	19.5%	4.5%

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The Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS) measures kindergarten readiness based on data collected in six domains: physical, social-emotional, cognitive, language, math, and literacy. WaKIDS data shows that less than half of all students in Whatcom County arrive developmentally ready for kindergarten; that number shrinks to 25% for low-income or BIPOC children.¹¹

Head Start and ECEAP Availability in Whatcom County School Districts

Washington State’s Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) publishes an annual saturation study to examine Head Start and ECEAP access and availability statewide and determine Expansion Priority Groups. The higher the group number, the more urgent DCYF considers expansion for HS/ECEAP program slots to be. The 2021-22 saturation study findings as they relate to Whatcom County are included below:

Table 17: DCYF 2021 – 2022 Saturation Study Findings for Whatcom County Public Schools

School District	ECEAP / HS Slots	Estimated Eligible Children	Percent Served	Unserved Eligible Children	Total Priority Points	Priority Group
Bellingham	227	589	39%	362	5	2
Blaine	18	91	20%	73	3	4
Ferndale	175	218	80%	43	4	3
Lynden	15	96	16%	81	3	4
Meridian	28	79	35%	51	3	4
Mt. Baker	67	127	54%	59	3	4
Nooksack	84	86	98%	2	3	4

Transitional Kindergarten

In 2012, Bellingham Public Schools launched a part-year (February-June) transitional kindergarten program called Promise K. This three-classroom, 45-slot program was **only** for four-year olds who had no other option for a preschool classroom experience before entering kindergarten.

Today, there are 602 transitional kindergarten slots being offered in six of Whatcom County’s seven public school districts, with more being added each year and some districts allowing transfer directly from Head Start/ECEAP to TK. The last five years has seen the number of TK slots in Bellingham more than double from 117 in 2018-19 to 252 in 2022-23. Some districts also offer programming for three-year olds, blending Special Education and Title I funds. Many

TK programs follow district schedules (five days per week, September-June) and offer transportation.

While we fully support quality preschool class experiences for all children as essential to kindergarten readiness, we continue to hope for more coordination between the districts and other programs that have been providing these services prior to TK. In addition to losing students to TK, as mentioned in the *Funded vs. Cumulative Enrollment* section of this report, we have also lost staff and classroom space. In an already very tight labor market, it is extremely hard on our program to lose staff to the higher wages that school districts can offer. And with many of our classrooms located in school district buildings, and those districts looking to expand their TK offerings, our Head Start and ECEAP classes are feeling the competitive pressure for that space. Case in point: two different school districts have already requested space be returned to them for ECEAP classrooms we have been unable to staff this year (Blaine and Birchwood).

Health and Nutrition

CountyHealthRanks.org, a project of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, ranks Whatcom County as among the healthiest in Washington (#7 of 39)¹². In their latest compiled health rankings, Whatcom County exhibited the following quality of life health indicators and outcomes compared to Washington state as a whole:

Table 18: Health Indicators for Whatcom County vs. Washington State

Indicator/Outcome	Whatcom County	Washington State
Population reporting poor or fair health	16%	16%
Poor physical health days per year	4.0	3.9
Frequent physical distress	12%	12%
Poor mental health days per year	4.4	4.4
Frequent mental distress	14%	14%
Low birth weight	6%	7%
Diabetes prevalence	9%	9%
Mammography screening	45%	40%
Life expectancy	81.0 years	80.2 years

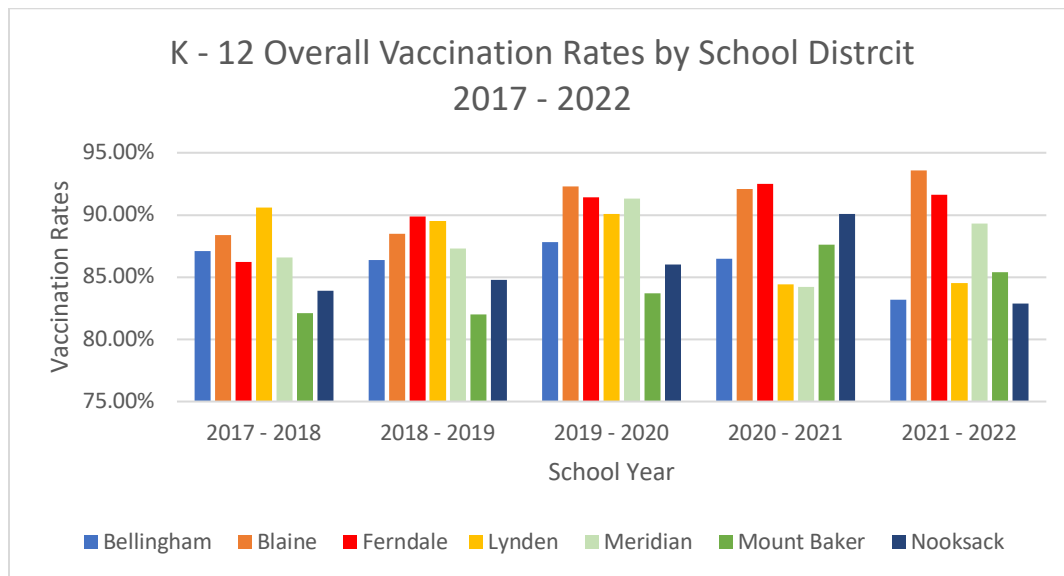
However, this data also shows Whatcom County's rate of uninsured adults (11%) and children (4%) to be above the state average for each (9% and 3%, respectively).

According to the Whatcom County Health Department's *Covid-19 Community Health Impact Assessment* (July 2021), "many people delayed seeking health care at the height of the pandemic, exacerbating behavioral and physical health conditions, and deferring identification and treatment of developmental delays for young children."¹³

Over the last five years, vaccination rates for K-12 students in Whatcom County have varied district to district. Per the Washington State Department of Health's School Immunization Data, Blaine, Ferndale, and Mount Baker School Districts have shown upward trends in vaccination rates, while other districts such as Bellingham and Lynden have shown a downward trend—

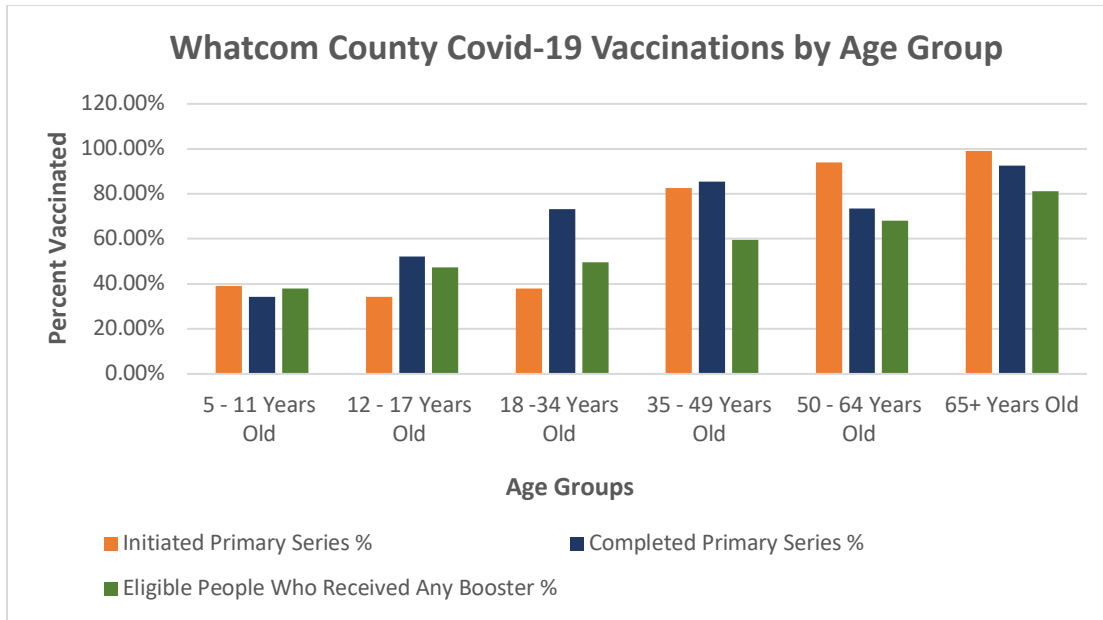
specifically in the last two school years (2020-21 and 2021-22)—with each district showing a decrease of 4.6% and 5.6% in vaccinated students respectively. Meridian and Nooksack School Districts each saw a slight trend towards growth in vaccinated K-12 students over the last five years, but not quite as dramatic as Blaine, Ferndale and Mount Baker did. These trends are illustrated in the next graph.

Figure 35: K-12 Vaccination Rates in Whatcom Public School Districts 2017 - 2022



The next chart illustrates Whatcom County’s Covid vaccination rates broken down by age demographics. For our purposes, it is important to note that 87.6% of the population five years of age or older has had at least one dose of the vaccine and 78.6% have completed the primary series of vaccinations. At time of reporting, data was not yet available for children in this age range who have received booster doses of the vaccine.

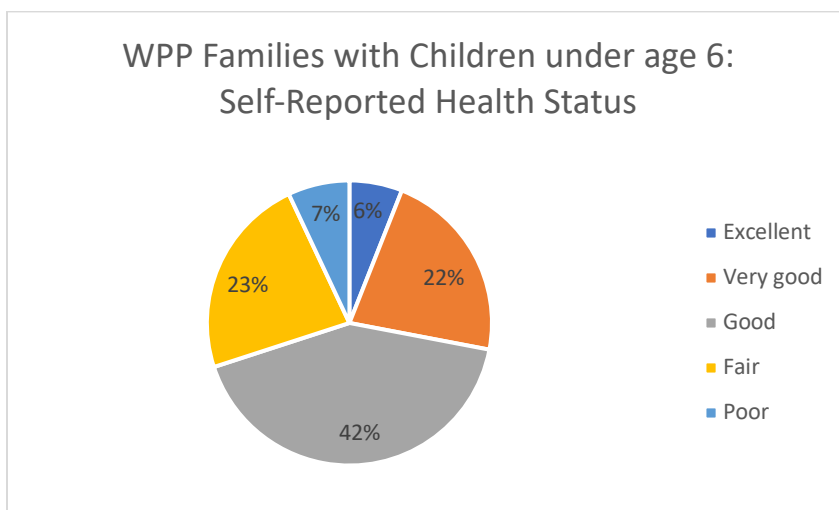
Figure 36: Whatcom County Covid-19 Vaccinations by Age Group



ELAFS preschool classroom closures due to Covid were common throughout the last few program years, whether caused by student or staff exposure and/or illness, despite Opportunity Council's requirement that all staff without a legal exemption be vaccinated.

When asked to self-report health status, slightly more Whatcom Prosperity Project respondents reported fair or poor health (31%) than very good or excellent health (28%). However, 42% of respondents reported good health.

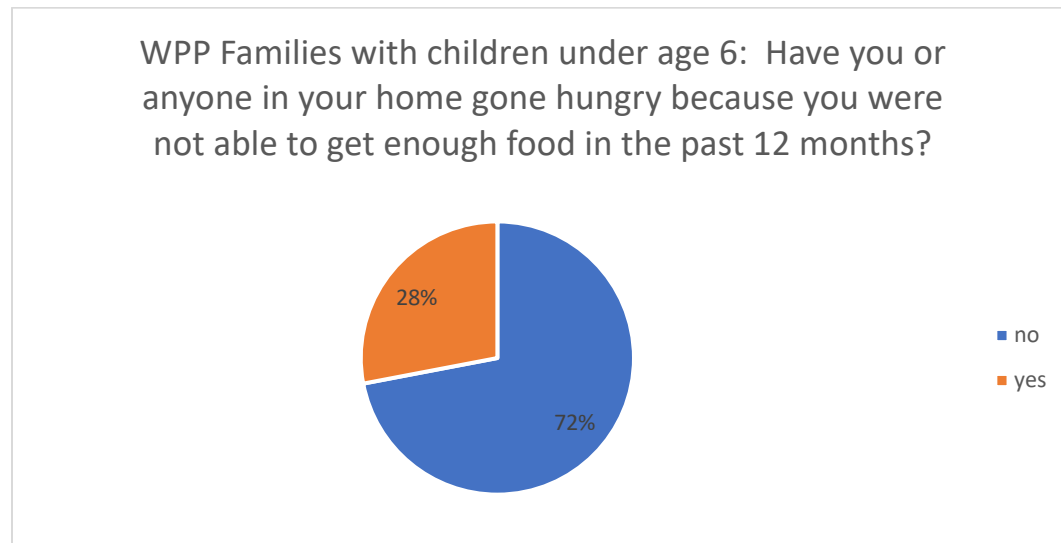
Figure 37: Self-Reported Health Status of Families with Children under Six from WPP



Of the overall WPP survey group, “the lowest income respondents were especially likely to give unfavorable health ratings (50%).” Additionally, “affordable dental care has been consistently rated as very important and difficult to access.”

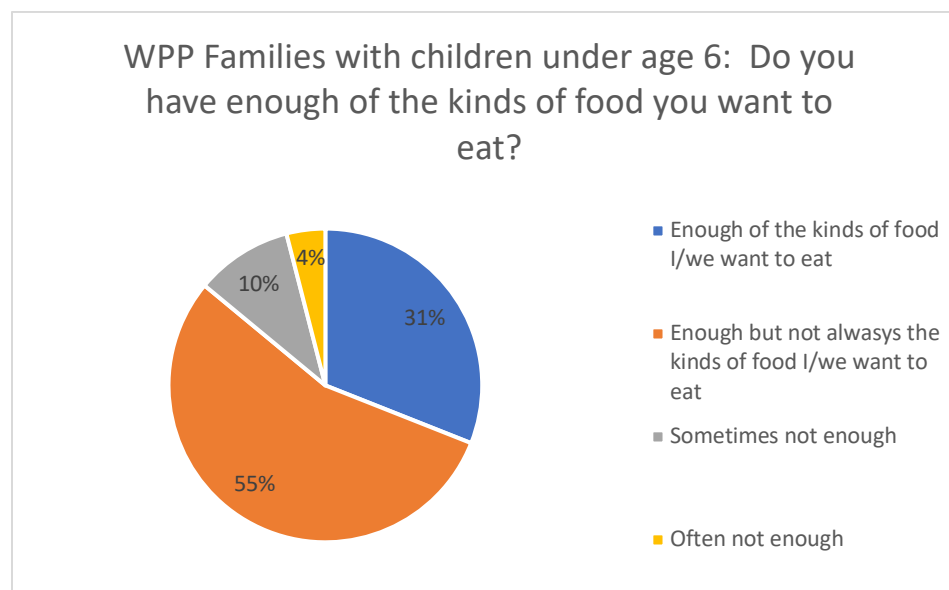
When asked about specific food access situations faced in the last twelve months, 28% of WPP households with children under age six reported that they or someone in their family had gone hungry because they were not able to get enough food.

Figure 38: Response to WPP Hunger Survey from Families with Children under Six



While 86% responded that they had enough food in the past seven days, well over half indicated that they did not always have enough of the kinds of food they wanted to eat. 14% reported not having enough to eat either “sometimes” or “often” in the past seven days.

Figure 39: WPP Families Response to Hunger Survey: Availability of Food



Social Services

According to the WPP report, “dental, housing, living wage jobs, and utility assistance were rated as above average in importance and below average in availability in Whatcom County”. Notably, households with young children reported gaps in all six of the highest importance/lowest availability service areas.

Table 19: Gaps in Service by Segments of Client Population from WPP

	Dental	Jobs	Housing	Mental Health	Childcare	Utilities
Region wide	✓	✓	✓			
Island County	✓	✓		✓		
San Juan County	✓	✓	✓			
Whatcom County	✓	✓	✓			
Households with Young Children	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Households with Seniors	✓		✓			
Spanish Speaking Households	✓	✓	✓			
POC Households	✓	✓	✓			

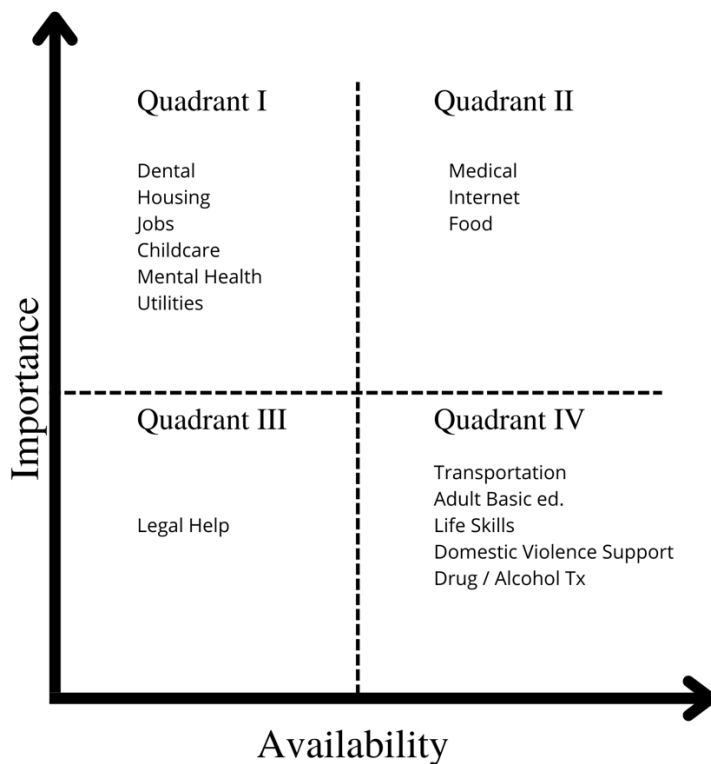
Because survey respondents rated these services on five-point scales, another way to analyze this data is to calculate the average importance and availability scores for each service to create an “importance-availability” coordinate rating system. The average importance and availability ratings were calculated and plotted on a graph as seen below. The lines making up the “crosshairs” of the graph represent the average importance score and the average availability score for each group of survey respondents.

The importance-availability chart is divided into quadrants that rate the services as follows:

- Quadrant I: Above average in importance and below average in availability
- Quadrant II: Above average in importance and availability
- Quadrant III: Below average in importance and availability
- Quadrant IV: Below average in importance, and above average in availability

Services in Quadrant I are those that, on average, are extremely important to low-income households with young children, and very hard for them to access.

Figure 40: Importance vs. Availability of Services Survey Results from WPP



Child Care

Families in Whatcom County face both a lack of childcare options and prohibitively high childcare costs.

Demand for high-quality licensed childcare far exceeds the available supply in Whatcom County. The Center for Economic and Business Research at Western Washington University estimates that the gap between the supply and demand of formal childcare by 2025 is 12,068 FTE. In 2021, childcare capacity in Whatcom County totaled 3,686 via 106 programs. Nearly half of the childcare capacity was provided by childcare centers, including license-exempt pre-school (47%). Licensed family childcare programs provided 30%, and school-programs provided 23% of formal childcare.

The median cost of childcare consumes between 11% and 26% of household income for one child. Families with two children or more children face double the cost or more, putting enormous cost burdens on families with low and medium incomes. Families that access subsidy find some relief, but families with wages 65% or more of the area median income do not qualify for childcare subsidy programs.

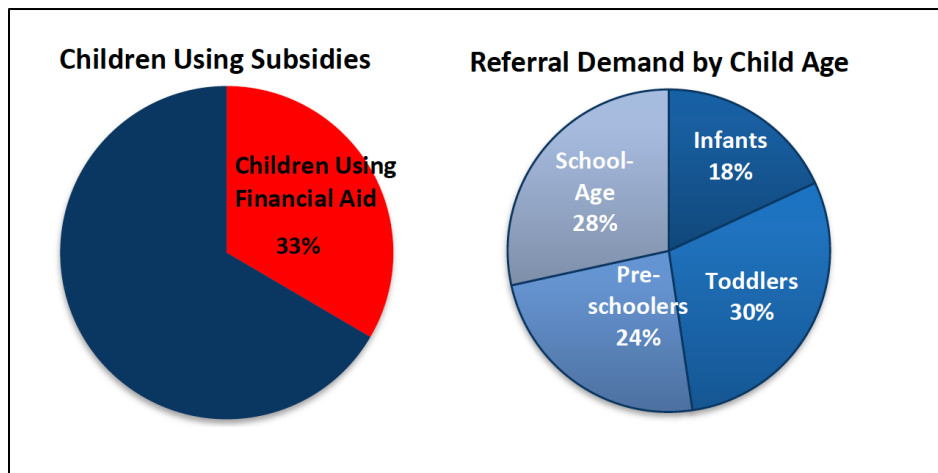
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Table 20: Monthly Cost of Child Care in 2021 from CCA

Monthly Cost of Child Care in 2021				
Centers	Median Cost	75th Percentile Cost	State Subsidy Rate	Median Cost as a % of Median Income
Infant	\$1,460	\$1,668	\$1,654	26%
Toddler	\$1,413	\$1,517	\$1,482	25%
Preschool	\$1,181	\$1,300	\$1,249	21%
School Age	\$628	\$689	\$946	11%

Family Child Care	Median Cost	75th Percentile Cost	State Subsidy Rate	Median Cost as a % of Median Income
Infant	\$1,083	\$1,210	\$1,192	19%
Toddler	\$1,011	\$1,083	\$1,059	18%
Preschool	\$939	\$1,051	\$1,040	17%
School Age	\$542	\$618	\$867	10%

Table 21: 2021 Referral Data for Whatcom County from Child Care of Washington



Resources Available in the Community

A 2021 report from the Whatcom Early Learning Alliance (WELA) titled *Building a Better Future for Whatcom County Children* states that “Whatcom County has a long history of building coordinated systems to serve families with children.” SEAS is cited as one of those programs, along with the recently formed Perinatal Mental Health Task Force, and WELA itself, which has been key in implementing a Help Me Grow framework in Whatcom County. Planned SEAS expansion will bring support to *all* pregnant and postpartum families with children five and under, regardless of health status, in the years ahead.

More generally, housed within Opportunity Council is the Whatcom Asset Building Coalition (WABC), a community collaboration which maintains a constantly updated resource library including information on how to access:

- food resources
- utility assistance
- financial resources
- housing and shelter
- community resources and social services
- employment and unemployment support
- health services
- clothing and hygiene resources
- programs and resources for children and families
- legal assistance
- money management/financial resiliency

WABC provides resource information on-line (<https://www.whatcomabc.org>) and in print in English, Punjabi, Russian, Spanish and Vietnamese. They also host quarterly information sessions and deep dives on specific topics. All ELAFS families enrolled in Head Start, ECEAP, and/or Early Head Start are provided with information on how to access WABC.

In support of Whatcom ABC, the Whatcom Resource Information Collaborative (WRIC) will be launching later this year as a *data utility* which will provide “resource information as a service to everyone in the community—like a power or gas company”. Whatcom ABC will continue day-to-day administration and operations as the *data steward*, “managing the technology and contents of the Data Utility on behalf of the WRIC and our community at large.”¹⁴

Strengths of the Community

In recent years, Whatcom County residents, elected officials, health care, social service agencies, philanthropic organizations and businesses have increasingly acknowledged the importance of investing in children--especially those who are the most vulnerable--during critical periods of growth and development.

In 2020, the Whatcom County Council approved the *Child and Family Action Plan*, which in turn established the Child and Family Well-being Task Force to implement the plan’s recommendations. These include reviewing local governmental impacts on children and families and making specific recommendations to County Council, Executive, and other appropriate officials for improvement using input from diverse families and evidence-based and promising practices.

Most recently, in November 2022, Whatcom County voters passed the Healthy Children’s Initiative (Proposition 5) to establish a dedicated fund to support young children and their families. This will be achieved through a property tax of \$0.19 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation or about \$95 per household per year (or \$7.92 per month) to raise between \$8.2 and \$10 million

per year countywide, depending on property valuation trends. Of this revenue, 55-68% must go to early learning and care.

According to the county's website:¹⁵

Initial prioritization of funds will go to projects that build capacity in rural areas, have a significant effect on our most vulnerable communities, have the greatest impact overall, and support children and families to find safe homes and get the support they need to thrive.

This new Healthy Children's Initiative builds on more than a decade of work by hundreds of our fellow community members, in both the public and private sector. It is dedicated to the idea that improving the health of our youngest residents improves the health of our entire community.

Although Proposition 5 passed narrowly, political will in Whatcom County in support of early learning and families would seem to be at a high-water mark. OC and ELAFS join proponents of the Healthy Children's Fund in their vision to "help all children in Whatcom County thrive by five!"

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¹⁵Whatcom County Health Department
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