

5/11/2021

In response to Whatcom County Council's request for comment on the Permanent Affordability of Child Care in Whatcom County proposed March 23, 2021

1. What role do you see for Whatcom County Government in helping making quality childcare accessible and affordable?

Bring Whatcom County Childcare back to the affordable, cutting edge childcare that was available to all income levels in the late 60's, early 70's....ABC Learning World was Whatcom County's first childcare facility dedicated to pre-K, early childhood education and childcare and was in the same location that is now Camber and the facility next to it.

Utilize the American Rescue Funds that are available now and will sunset in December of 2024 (approx. 40 months of funding) to create a county-wide framework to assist existing and start-up child-care facilities to minimize increasingly cumbersome regulatory requirements, streamline increasing red-tape and perhaps create grants to:

- support utilization to enhance and revitalize pre-existing town(s) and county infrastructures,
- encourage diverse income levels
- support early learning curriculums
- support increasing need for shift work childcare
- support longevity (pay, benefits) childcare staffing
- lobby against unmanageable and redundant regulations. Existing childcare providers continue to face increased operational requirements that hurt ability to hire/retain staff and maintain existing hours
- assist in operating expenses as existing facilities are required to keep low student to staff ratio (for example Staff to Child ratio for infants is 1 to 4 (Group size 8), for Toddlers is 1 to 7 (Group size 14)
- assist in operating expenses due to pandemic related decreased enrollment and increased costs

As over half of Birch employees need(ed) childcare solutions. Birch polled staff about the [proposed childcare resolution](#). Their feedback is reflected in comments below.

-Structure/rationale as presented suggests childcare costs are only a struggle for families that qualify for public assistance or fall below a pre-determined income threshold. There is little help for people right on the edge of qualifying or those working to pay for childcare (in other words, they want to stay relevant in the workforce, but entire paycheck goes to childcare to do so).

-Repeated conversation in state and countrywide 'Social media Mom Groups' are that moms in low-income brackets that are receiving aid, can't afford to take the job promotions they want to take because they will lose the (in Washington State) DSHS aid and be worse off financially.

-In relation to Birch employees (and many other dual income and single working parents)- they won't see a benefit in childcare becoming available as they are not eligible for DSHS and other aid (we understand this level to be at \$53k annual pay in Whatcom County).

Employees polled very much appreciate the quality and care of their existing childcare facilities (but not the 5-year wait list) and are concerned seeing the ever growing, unattainable regulations existing childcare facilities are facing. Please find the following examples summarized from a Whatcom County childcare facility to a Birch employee:

- Staffing is the greatest challenge.
- The latest Department of Health guidelines still include cohorts: Keeping children & staff in the same small groups every day to reduce # of close contacts they have.
- If there is a positive case in the classroom the classroom has to close for 14 days – doesn't matter if the teacher is vaccinated.
- 3 step intense cleaning process – 1st) Soap spray, sprayed then wiped off 2) water spray, sprayed and wiped off 3) bleach spray – air dry... All fabrics are changed nightly -- even the sandbox toys have to be cleaned like this.
- There may be further reduce hours for fall quarter, they'll announce hopefully no later than fall quarter.
- There are only 4 days a week available so many fulltime employees are also having to add additional home childcare.

2.What roadblocks do you see in making this vision happen?

- See above.
- Having "a minimum of 60% of the childcare spots shall be prioritized for families at or below the 21 ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, and Employed) threshold" won't create any more spots for majority of the working parents in Whatcom County.

3.If this resolution was enacted, how would it positively impact childcare in Whatcom County?

- Depends on what kinds of requirements, restrictions and reporting is tied to the resolution.
- Could create more spots countywide and support shift worker demand. The more choices people have the better.

4.What is your vision for childcare in Whatcom County in 2040? How do you see government, nonprofits, and businesses working together to provide quality childcare that is accessible and affordable?

- Facilitate existing and start up operators by stream-lining regulations. Let operators spend time and resources on enriching children for healthy development – academic and social.
- Create/maintain central website with updated inventory of childcare spots available for parents to access including rate and facility hours of operations, type of assistance available, easy to use calculators and very simple way to compare different facilities based on need.
- Facilitate a single point of registration for families county-wide that includes a way to update information online. Don't make it mandatory or the only way to register but offer to streamline registration process for families and caregivers.

5.If this resolution was enacted, how could it negatively impact childcare in Whatcom County?

- Resolution as proposed would not help the many of dual income and single working parents in Whatcom County.
- Could add even more unnecessary regulatory burdens and added costs to childcare provider operations.
- Potential unsustainable funding

6.What other ideas do you have for how these funds would best be used for long-term, sustainable childcare solutions?

- Revolving loan fund for construction/capital improvements to childcare facilities.
- Training opportunities for childcare workers.
- Incentives for childcare workers who meet longevity benchmarks.