



# COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

## *Shoring up the gaps*

The purpose of this Community Needs Assessment is to identify needs of the children and families who are eligible for Head Start/ECEAP in Walla Walla County, analyze services currently offered to them, and see how our program can help shore up gaps between needs and services.

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## Our Community, Our Public Schools

Walla Walla County was formed in 1854 and was named after the Walla Walla tribe of Native Americans. Walla Walla covers 1,271 square miles of land, ranking 26th in size among Washington's 39 counties. Walla Walla County is located in the southeastern part of Washington State. With a population of just over 58,000, it is a small community where scenic beauty, incredible wineries, enticing restaurants, cultural inspiration, outdoor adventures and small town friendliness come together to create a caring community of individuals and families.

With a regional airport, two local hospitals, the regional cancer center, the regional Veteran's Association Facility, two colleges, the largest irrigation company in the world, new technical and energy companies, and the state penitentiary, Walla Walla has strong employment opportunities. Walla Walla has also been known as one of the most fertile agricultural areas in the nation, producing such crops as wheat, asparagus, strawberries and the famous Walla Walla sweet onion. Most recently, Walla Walla has been celebrated for the local wine and vineyard community.

The Walla Walla Valley is the hub for medical, professional and business services for Southeastern Washington with major employers including food-processors, machinery and irrigation manufacturers, schools and colleges, state and local governments, and utilities. The Walla Walla Valley is also home to 10 financial institutions, including Washington State's first commercial bank and its oldest savings and loan association. There are 12 clinics, and more than 120 physicians, dentists, orthodontists and optometrists.

Current unemployment rates put Walla Walla at 7.1% for 2016-2017, though this figure has not yet been adjusted for 2017 seasonal employment. Median household income for 2016 was \$52,094, compared to the state average of \$65,500. 2015 poverty rates list Walla Walla County with 25.4% of residents living below the poverty level, compared to 16% overall for the state.

Walla Walla County is governed by three county commissioners who are elected to four-year terms. The City of Walla Walla is governed by an elected seven-member council. The council elects a mayor from the council and hires a city manager to administer the day-to-day activities of the city. Other incorporated towns in Walla Walla County are governed by township rules that provide for an elected mayor-council form of government. The Port of Walla Walla is governed by a three-member commission elected on a county-wide basis for six-year terms. Walla Walla County also includes the communities of College Place, Waitsburg, Touchet, Lowden, Burbank, Prescott and Wallula.

Walla Walla Public Schools (WWPS) is the largest district in the county, with six elementary schools, two middle schools, two high schools, a regional high school technical skills center, special education preschool and the Head Start/ECEAP preschool. Enrollment consists of nearly 6,000 students, preschool through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Currently 55% of the students are white, 39% Hispanic and approximately 6% of mixed race or other races. WWPS estimates that 56% of the school population receives free or reduced meals. Of the student population, 693 are in the special education program, and 150 are in the gifted/talented program.

## Demographic Characteristics of Walla Walla County

Walla Walla County Population by Races		
Race	Population	% of Total
Total Population	58,781	100
<a href="#">White</a>	49,654	84
<a href="#">Hispanic or Latino</a>	11,593	19
<a href="#">Some Other Race</a>	4,692	7
<a href="#">Two or More Races</a>	1,828	3
<a href="#">Black or African American</a>	1,079	1
<a href="#">Asian</a>	758	1
<a href="#">American Indian</a>	603	1
<a href="#">Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander</a>	167	Below 1%
<a href="#">Three or more races</a>	121	Below 1%

Walla Walla County Population by Races and Gender			
	Male	Female	Total
Total Population	29,835	28,946	58,781
<a href="#">White</a>	24,865	24,789	49,654
<a href="#">Hispanic or Latino</a>	6,014	5,579	11,593
<a href="#">Some Other Race</a>	2,470	2,222	4,692
<a href="#">Two or More Races</a>	883	945	1,828
<a href="#">Black or African American</a>	868	211	1,079
<a href="#">Asian</a>	312	446	758
<a href="#">American Indian</a>	346	257	603
<a href="#">Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander</a>	91	76	167
<a href="#">Three or more races</a>	57	64	121

## Student Demographics – Walla Walla Public Schools

<b>Enrollment</b>		
October 2015 Student Count		5,919
May 2016 Student Count		5,982
<b>Gender (October 2015)</b>		
Male	2,989	50.5%
Female	2,930	49.5%
<b>Race/Ethnicity (October 2015)</b>		
Hispanic / Latino of any race(s)	2,264	38.2%
American Indian / Alaskan Native	24	0.4%
Asian	73	1.2%
Black / African American	51	0.9%
Native Hawaiian / Other Pacific Islander	9	0.2%
White	3,299	55.7%
Two or More Races	199	3.4%
<b>Special Programs</b>		
Free or Reduced-Price Meals (May 2016)	3,301	55.2%
Special Education (May 2016)	818	13.7%
Transitional Bilingual (May 2016)	802	13.4%
Migrant (May 2016)	103	1.7%
Section 504 (May 2016)	157	2.6%
Foster Care (May 2016)	70	1.2%
<b>Other Information (<a href="#">more info</a>)</b>		
Unexcused Absence Rate (2015-16)	2,448	0.4%
Adjusted 4-Year Cohort Graduation Rate (Class of 2015)		80.4%
Adjusted 5-year Cohort Graduation Rate (Class of 2014)		84.0%
<b><u>College/University enrollment rates of graduates</u></b>		

## Walla Walla Public Schools Head Start/ECEAP Program

The Walla Walla Public Schools Head Start/ECEAP Preschool Program provides free preschool classes for qualifying children ages 3 to 5 living in Walla Walla County. Each classroom accommodates both a morning and afternoon session of up to 17 children. A family-style lunch and a snack are provided during each class. WWPS is a blended-funded preschool with Head Start a federal government funded program and ECEAP (Early childhood Education Assistance Program) a state funded preschool program.

### Current Head Start/ ECEAP Services

For 2016-17 there are 136 Head Start spots (58%) and 97 ECEAP spots (42%) blended into 7 classrooms of 14 classes. There are 7 lead teachers, 7 assistant teachers and 4 support para-educators. There are approximately 10 Head Start students and 7 ECEAP students per class. For Head Start, 99 of the students are Hispanic and 28 Hispanic for ECEAP. Instruction is provided in English with support in Spanish from the bilingual assistant teacher. During the 2016-17 school year, the program has had a total of 8 foster children, 25 children on an IEP and 21 homeless at time of enrollment.

Families and children must qualify for the program with one of the following categories: public assistance, homelessness, or income below the federal poverty guidelines. If all eligible children on the waiting list have been enrolled, children from families who are low income can be enrolled up to a maximum of 35%, and an additional 10% can be enrolled from overincome families if there is a developmental or environmental risk factor present. Also, children can qualify for ECEAP if they have an IEP (Individualized Education Program for children who qualify for special education services).

Services the program provide include on-site health clinic, mental health, health screenings, child development screenings, disabilities services, parent education, family advocates/parent goal mentoring, service referrals and family activities. The students in these programs all receive free meals through USDA programs.

The program does provide limited transportation for enrolled students this school year. Transportation is limited to neighbourhood stops and bus seats available. Routes should be limited to one hour, but due to demand, the Head Start Regional Office provided the program with a waiver to allow an additional 15 minutes per route. Currently there are 70 children utilizing transportation in the morning and 63 in the afternoon classes.

The goal of the Head Start / ECEAP program is to provide a strong family development program that provide comprehensive education, health and social services for children and their

families. Head Start/ECEAP provides early learning and school readiness by enhancing the cognitive, social, and emotional development of our students.

The role of parents as their child's first and most important teacher is emphasized by the program's structure and activities. Staff strives to build relationships with families that support family well-being and positive parent-child relationships. Each family has access to a family advocate and encouraged to attend parent and family events. There is also an 85% attendance requirement for students in the programs.

### The Future of Eligible Families

The Washington State Department of Early Learning (DEL) has a statutory requirement (RCW 43.215.456) to serve all ECEAP eligible children beginning in the school year 2020-21. The DEL estimated that there are 22,290 eligible children not served by Head Start or ECEAP in the state.

Currently using the DEL saturation study, WWPS has 233 Head Start and ECEAP slots with an estimated 258 eligible children within their service area. WWPS currently serves 90% of eligible children based on this study.

The best predictor of eligibility available to school districts is the free and reduced lunch student numbers. Currently, 56% of the students enrolled in WWPS receive free or reduced lunch. With an estimated of 410 incoming kindergartners per school year, it is estimated that 230 kindergarten students will be using the free and reduced lunch program.

### Community Contributors

There are a few factors to consider when rating eligible families. With the assistance of staff and current enrolled families, I could construct viable answers and estimate where the gaps are to increase enrollment with eligible families.

Head Start/ECEAP staff was interviewed including Parent Involvement Coordinator, Family Services & Mental Health Coordinator, Education Coordinator, Family Advocates, Health & Nutrition Coordinator and Head Secretary.

Three families were also interviewed for their work, school and training schedules as parents of children in the local program and to shed light on situations that would cause families to choose other educational options.

### Findings

1. *There is an increased need for full day child care for local children 3 to 5 years old.* This is the largest barrier for local families when considering preschool in our community. As a community, we want our citizens working and providing for their families but we need to be willing to support the children to make this possible.

Siting the Port of Walla Walla History of Employment report for 2016-17 over 700 full-time jobs were added to our community in one year. There is a steady increase in employment in Walla Walla County but we are still lagging behind the state income average. With more families working the need for child care in our community is on the rise. Currently there are only 56 licensed child care providers in the county that can service 1282 children birth to 5 years old (see 2017 County Data Report). Using the same data 20% are considered preschool age with an estimated 53% of families using subsidies. With this data that would lead to an estimate of 256 children who would be eligible for Head Start/ECEAP but would need a longer day to cover child care needs.

*2. Parents working or attending school need a minimum of 5 hours of school and or work to qualify for the Working Connections Grant.*

Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) helps families with low incomes pay for child care while they work or meet WorkFirst participation requirements. The parent must be employed or self-employed in legal, income-generating, taxable activities; or the parent must meet all TANF/WorkFirst requirements if participating in that program. When a family qualifies for child care subsidy benefits and chooses an eligible provider, the state pays a portion of the cost of child care. The parent is also responsible to pay a copayment to the provider each month. If there are multiple children in the household and WWCC assists in child care payments the hours of our local Head Start/ECEAP will not allow the parents to work or attend school full time. This would lead to families to make the choice to forgo preschool for full day child care.

*3. The increase of minimum wage in the state of Washington.*

With the new minimum wage increase our low-income families are making an incremental amount of more income. At the same time, our Governor has decided not to change the income guidelines for ECEAP putting our low-income children at risk. Even with the increase, families are not making enough to pay monthly for private preschool. The decision would be made then to forgo preschool if was not free for the families. In a discussion with Frank Ordway, Assistant Director of Government and Community Relations with the Department of Early Learning he confirmed that now the Governor is not considering any income guideline changes soon. This could have long term ramifications on kindergarten readiness for our low-income children.

*4. Greater transportation needs for local families.*

Transportation is the second largest barrier when considering preschool for families. The ability to get children to and from school is an obstacle for WWPS with buses and staffing. The 2016-17 year has been better than years past but increasing transportation needs to be considered to meet the needs of eligible children or even children already enrolled in the program.

*5. Facility Needs*

Facility space for support staff, teachers and students is easily the third barrier. Currently the WWPS Head Start/ECEAP is located at Blue Ridge Elementary. With 14 classes occupying 7 classrooms, the space is utilized to its maximum. The staff and teachers are very creative in sharing space and using every corner available to them. In this location, the program cannot

consider a full-day system and continue to serve the current number of children enrolled. Even in the present half-day system, more square footage is needed to accommodate parent meetings, counseling sessions, and quiet places for staff to work. Also, the preschool does not have adequate access to a gym or large open indoor area for children to play during rainy and frigid weather.

*6. Increased community education on what Head Start/ECEAP is and the need.*

The Head Start/ECEAP program is housed within WWPS. There are many benefits to this system but because it is not a stand-alone institution there is a lack of target marketing in the community on what the program accomplishes for a certain sector of our population. Citizens, the business population and stake holders would benefit by learning the details of Head Start/ECEAP beginning with the curriculum and benefits to families. With education, leaders in the community would become advocates for a proven system that works for our low-income children and the importance for kindergarten readiness and teaching executive function.

*7. The local preschool community.*

Walla Walla County has over 40 local preschools/child care programs varying in ages and class times. A handful do have full day options during the school year or summer (childcarecenter.us, themomsnetworkww.com). Many have waiting lists up to 6 months before the program begins. A turning point for some full-day programs is that for the school year 2017-18 there are no scholarship requests. Meaning that the families registered are working and can pay the full amount without subsidies. Though this is good for the institutions it also could mean that there will be less spots available for families who use subsidies for child care and they will have a harder time finding child care so they can continue to work.

## Community Services

### *For Families in Transition*

Walla Walla School District's *Families in Transition/Homeless Education Program* is in place to address and support the educational needs of students who find themselves in temporary or transitional housing during the school year. The Program works closely with local shelter and housing providers, local community agencies and resources, and the City of Walla Walla, County of Walla Walla and Washington state's Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. They work together to ensure educational stability for students in short-term/temporary and transitional/homeless housing situations so they feel supported and encouraged while they secure permanent housing. Any child or youth, including migrant and unaccompanied youth, who lacks a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence is considered homeless and McKinney-Vento eligible for assistance and services. This includes children and youth who are temporarily sharing housing with others due to loss of housing or economic hardship, those who are living in hotels, camping grounds, emergency shelters, cars, bus or train stations, or other similar settings, transitional housing programs, and those awaiting foster care or are in temporary placements. WWPS provides equal and comparable access to all students regardless of their home living situation.



### *For Migrant Families*

Inspire Development Center has 23 sites in Washington State and 16 have ECEAP classrooms. Our local Inspire Center has 40 ECEAP spots and it is full including a waiting list. The program is like the WWPS ECEAP set up with Family Advocates, home visits, health and nutrition services and parent investment. The main difference is Inspire is for season or migrant workers and is May-October Monday through Friday for 9 hours each day. There are currently 150 total children in the program (40 ECEAP) and the program is considered full of a waiting list. The largest barrier is space to the facility. Inspire is free for the families that qualify. Very rarely is anyone homeless because most of the families live on site. About 10% of the children are disabled and occasionally there are foster children in the program. The program is considered dual language and they speak the child's first language.

### *For Children with Disabilities*

In WWPS, Special Education services are offered to students ages Birth through 21 who have either suspected or documented disabilities. When a child/student has a suspected disability, they are referred for possible testing to see if they might become eligible for special education services. Once the referral process begins, there are specific laws surrounding the timelines that must be observed along every step of the Evaluation and (possible) enrolment process. Once the child/student qualifies for special education services, an IEP (Individual Education Program) document is written that specifies exactly what kind of services the student will receive, for how long, where those services will occur. Each Program and/or School in WWPS has a referral process. Developmental screenings for suspected delays are free to all children birth through five years of age who reside in Walla Walla School District boundaries.

### Birth to Three – Early Intervention Services

WWPS implements a family-centered home-based program for infants and toddlers. The program in partners with ESD 123 in Pasco. Services include early intervention in the areas of gross and fine motor, communication, cognitive, social, and adaptive skills. Infants and toddlers are referred for Assessment, and to receive services, they need to meet qualification criteria established by Federal and State guidelines.

### Special Education Preschool Program

Our preschool program provides services to children three to five years of age who qualify for services in the areas of communication, cognitive, social, adaptive, gross and fine motor. Our preschool classrooms offer a developmental curriculum to support learning needs of young children with identified developmental delays.

WWPS also works closely with the Walla Walla Valley Disability Network (WWVDN) which provides social and recreation opportunities as well as support and information to improve the quality of life for individuals with disabilities and their families.

WWVDN offers six recreation opportunities and partners with nine agencies to provide more events for families. WWVDN offers activities that are hard to find that are specifically suited to the unique needs of their families. Basketball, Summer Camps (funded by United Way), Whitman and WW University Buddy Programs, 4-H Horse Camp are all made possible because

of the relationships developed within our community. WWVDN is also a good referral network for our local Head Start/ECEAP classrooms.

#### *Early Head Start*

Walla Walla County has an Early Head Start program (EHS) coordinated through Children's Home Society. EHS provides prenatal care for parents and serves children 0 to 3 years of age. Women are referred from community partners such as pediatricians, schools, community outreach and hospitals. Children's Home Society has a total of 60 EHS slots, which include services to 9 pregnant women and 51 children. There are also 16 child care spots for working parents under Working Connection/DSHS. EHS provides comprehensive services that include health, nutrition, and mental health, monitoring the health of the family at home visit. This home-based program provides toys, play time, developmental assessment and educational information. During the prenatal program women received 1 to 2 home visits per month. The largest barrier for EHS is trust. Families need to trust the family advocates and allow home visits.

#### *Local Resources*

WWPS and the staff at Head Start/ECEAP is very aggressive in using local resources to connect families in the community but also to promote open spots. Each staff member reaches out and communicates directly for the family and encourages the connection.

#### *Local Resources include:*

The Health Center at Blue Ridge  
The Moms' Network  
Walla Walla Community College  
Children's Home Society  
Friends of Children of Walla Walla  
Family Medical Center  
YWCA  
YMCA  
Christian Aid Center  
Walla Walla Public Library  
DSHS  
Blue Mt. Action Council/Food Pantry  
ABCD Dental  
Campfire  
Catholic Charities  
Helpline  
Walla Walla Valley Disability Network  
County Health Department  
WIC (Women, Infant, Children)  
First Steps

## Summary and Recommendations

While math and reading levels are easy to assess, so many skills learned in a preschool environment to have our young children ready for kindergarten are less quantifiable. In the WWPS Head Start/ECEAP model, staff and curriculum focus on the child, while at the same time address the needs, goals and well-being of the whole family. Head Start/ECEAP provides a high quality early learning environment that teaches children to self-regulate, care about others, deal with adversity, live a healthier lifestyle, increase cognitive learning, language, literacy and be ready to enter kindergarten on a social-emotional level.

Studies by the National Head Start Association prove that there is an overwhelming body of recent evidence documenting the lasting benefits to children who would have experienced lower-quality child care or not have had the opportunity to receive a quality early-childhood education, if not for Head Start programs in their community. The studies also show that social-emotional skills have a greater effect on life skills than cognitive skills alone. Researchers found a decrease in lifetime violent crime, arrests and unemployment, in adults who attended a quality early childhood program. There were also positive short- and long-term effects on educational achievement, wages and health outcomes. There are many more studies that relate to the long-term contributions of early learning, but it is important to remember that the WWPS Head Start/ECEAP program provides a unique education system which includes a parent investment, a social-emotional component and early teaching of executive function.

However, all systems must evolve and change as family dynamics change in our community. Our WWPS Head Start/ECEAP program is short sighted by not providing a full-day education which would allow parents to work reasonable hours. This limits the choices the working poor have when looking for early education programs or child care facilities.

If the Department of Early Learning wants to have 90% of our young children ready for kindergarten by 2020, then they need to take a very realistic look at the guidelines for ECEAP qualifications. With new income opportunities, yet no change in ECEAP eligibility guidelines, families must make tough choices about early education and care. It would make one wonder if the program is so successful, why make it so hard to qualify? Why not be more inclusive for the success of our children?

There is overwhelming evidence that points to the value of investing in quality early learning development for birth to age 5. By removing barriers for eligible families to participate, more families would be willing and able to participate in our local Head Start/ECEAP programs.