

# Better Beginnings:

The State of Early Learning and Kindergarten Readiness in East Yakima





...and then they  
got to get out of  
school early...



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# Better Beginnings:

The State of  
Early Learning  
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Readiness in  
East Yakima

*August 2008*

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**R**esearch shows many Washington state children may need more early learning opportunities.

**S**ome teachers say most of their kindergartners from the lowest-income families are not ready when they begin school.

**M**ore than ever, getting our children ready to succeed at school is a national priority. Leaders, teachers, and parents want to learn about new ways to prepare children early so they can do well later in school and in life. Many want to know how to help children be prepared when they start kindergarten.

Research shows many Washington state children may need more early learning opportunities. This support can help them to start school prepared. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation wrote, “Investing in Children: An Early Learning Strategy for Washington.” This report tells of six family challenges that may put many Washington state children behind others when they start school, such as living in poverty and living with a single parent or no parent.

Almost one-fourth of Washington state’s children under age 5 have two or more of these family challenges. Some teachers say most of their kindergartners from the lowest-income families are not ready when they begin school.



### THE EARLY LEARNING INITIATIVE

In 2006, the Gates Foundation launched the Early Learning Initiative. This 10-year plan helps Washington state’s children prepare for school by:

- Testing high-quality early learning programs in two communities
- Building state systems that help support early learning
- Encouraging promising strategies throughout the state

The Gates Foundation joined with other funders and state leaders. They formed Thrive by Five Washington to create high-quality early learning opportunities for all children in the state.

### The Communities

The Gates Foundation looked for two communities to serve as models. It wanted to find places with a need for early learning services that would be able to build high-quality services for early learning. The foundation researched locations and spoke with members of the community. It chose East Yakima in central Washington. It also chose White Center, near Seattle.

**P**arents have limited access to quality child care and other resources, but they are working hard to provide the best environment for their children.



## The Research Study

Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., is studying the Early Learning Initiative. Mathematica is a respected research company based in Princeton, New Jersey. The study can be used to keep improving services in East Yakima and White Center. It can help state leaders understand how investing in early learning helps children perform better when they start school. It can also help show what practices work best for children.

## What This Paper Is About

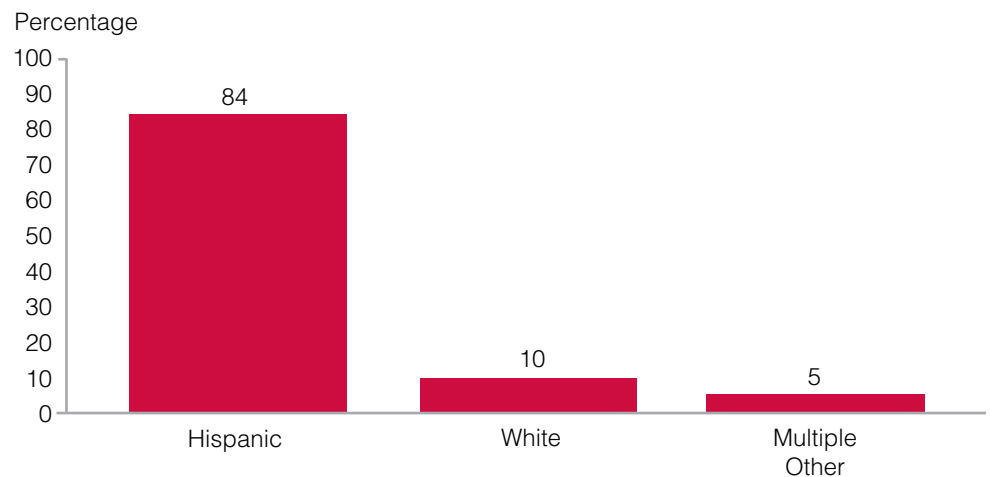
This paper is about East Yakima before the initiative started. It tells about some of the kindergartners, their families, and the children's school readiness. It describes early learning services and quality of the services. The information comes from interviews with staff and parents and a survey of service providers in 2007. Mathematica researchers also looked at child care settings and surveyed early education workers. They tested children and asked teachers to rate children's abilities. Information also comes from surveys of parents.

## Kindergartners and Their Families

Parents in East Yakima have a strong dedication to the family unit. Most families reported eating dinner together more than five times a week. Parents have limited access to quality child care and other resources, but they are working hard to provide the best environment for their children.

Children starting kindergarten in East Yakima are mostly Hispanic. Ten percent are white (Figure 1). About 37 percent of parents of these kindergarten children were born in the U.S.

Figure 1:  
**Race/Ethnicity of Children**

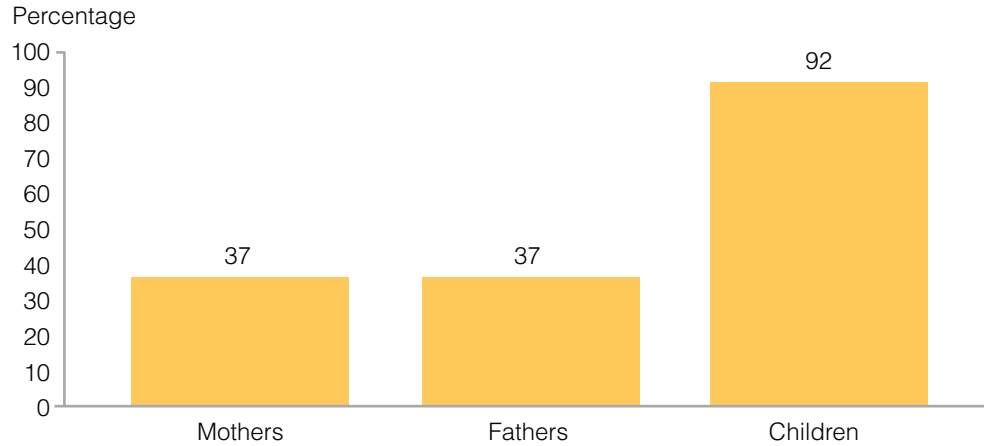


Source: Parent interview.



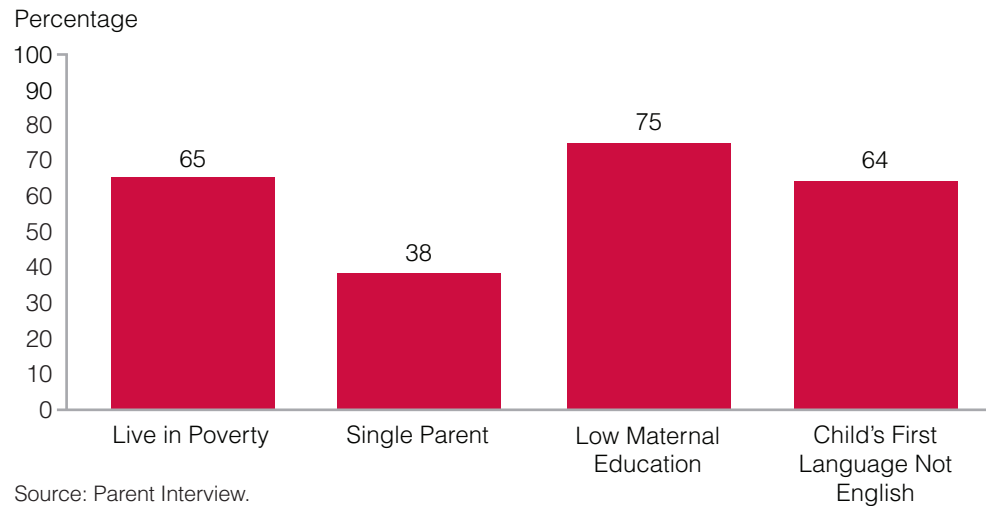
**P**arent interviews showed that many families face challenges that could affect later school success.

Figure 2:  
**Percentage of Parents and Children Born in the U.S.**



Source: Parent interview.

Figure 3:  
**Percentage of Children with Specific Family Risk Factors**



Source: Parent Interview.

(Figure 2). Of those not born in the U.S., half of mothers and 41 percent of fathers have been in the U.S. for less than 10 years.

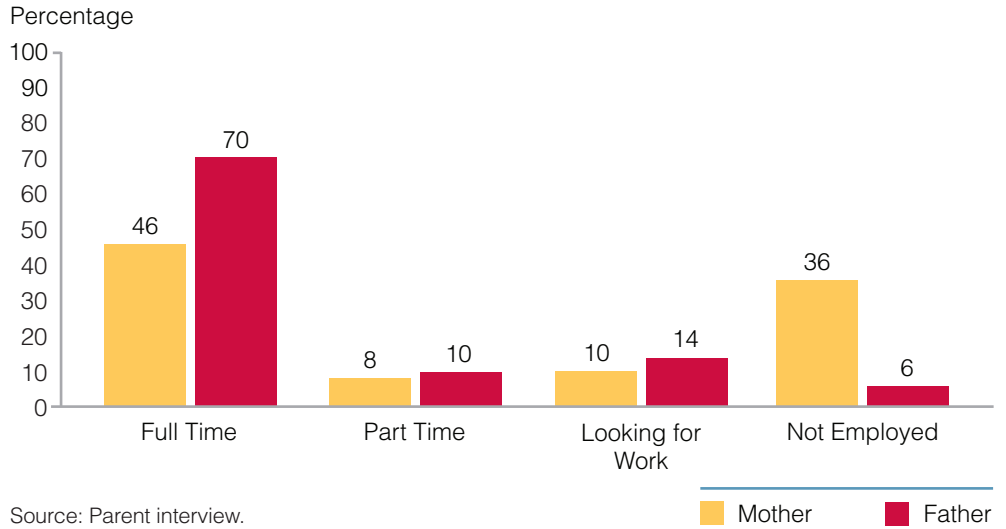
Parent interviews showed that many families face challenges that could affect later school success. Nearly two-thirds of families live in poverty. More than a third of the children live with only one parent. Three-quarters of mothers have less than a high school diploma or GED. Sixty-four percent of parents said their child's first language is not English (Figure 3). In fall 2007, about 80 percent of fathers and 54 percent of mothers worked at least part time (Figure 4).



**T**hirty-six percent of parents speak to their child in English at home.

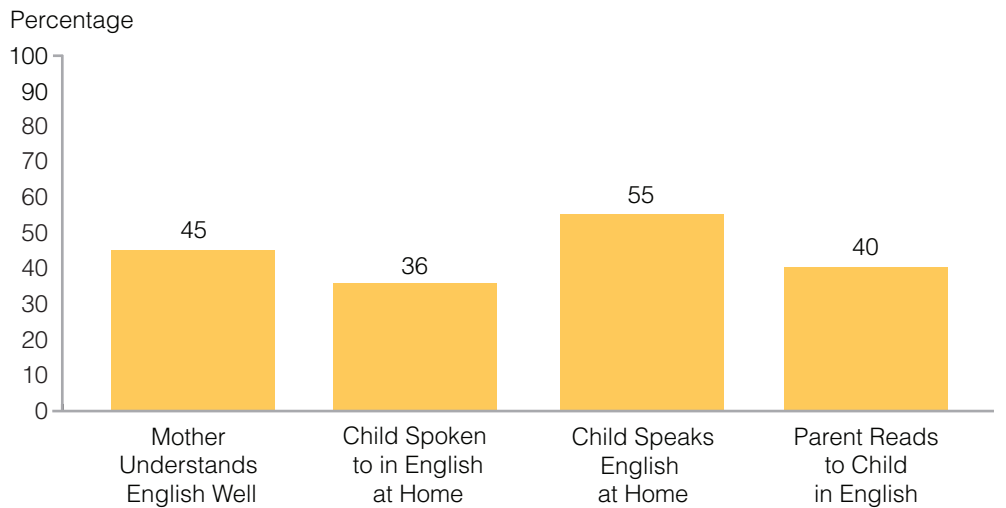


Figure 4:  
**Employment Status of Parents**



Source: Parent interview.

Figure 5:  
**Children's Exposure to English at Home**



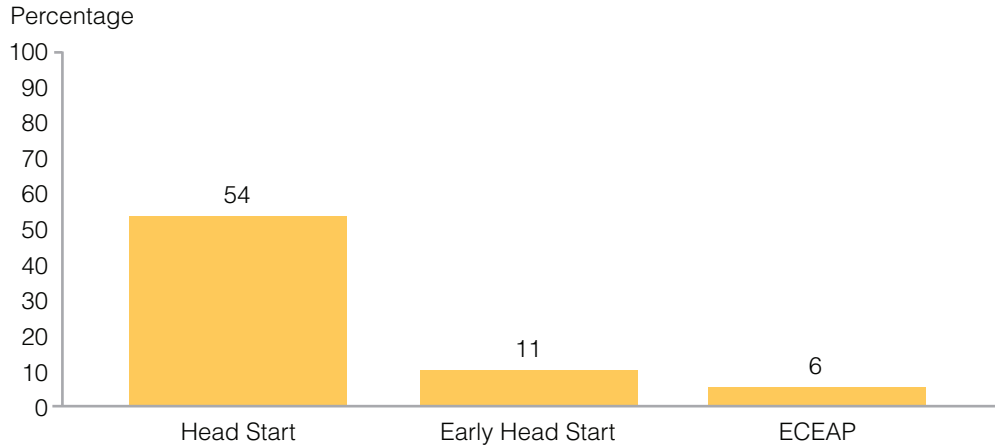
Source: Parent interview.

Use of English at home is limited. About half of mothers said they understand English well. Thirty-six percent of parents said they speak to their child in English at home. More than half said that their child usually speaks English at home. Forty percent reported reading to their child in English (Figure 5).



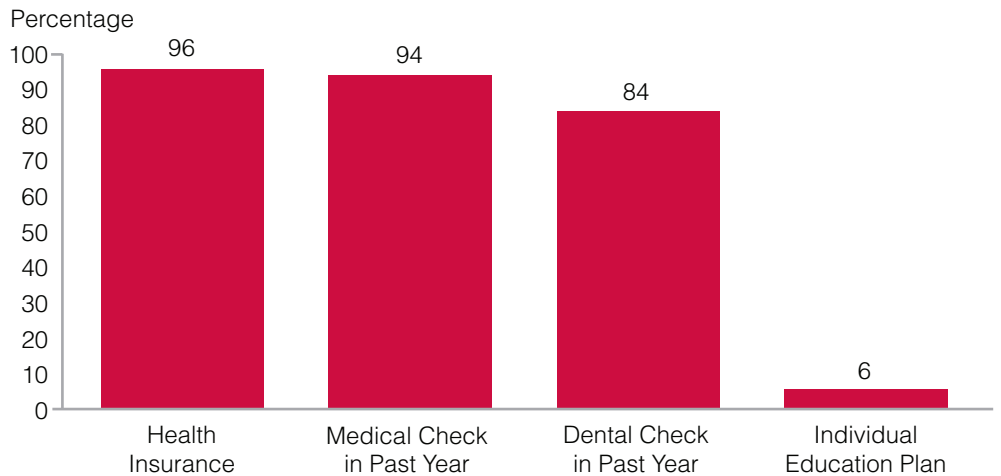
About 96 percent of parents of these kindergartners reported their child has health insurance.

Figure 6:  
**Children’s Participation in Early Childhood Programs**



Source: Parent interview.

Figure 7:  
**Use of Child Health Insurance and Services**



Source: Parent interview.

Parents described services their children used before they started school. Over half said their child had been in Head Start. Fewer children had been in Early Head Start and the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) (Figure 6).

About 96 percent of parents reported their child had health insurance, either public, private, or a combination. Ninety-four percent said their child had a medical checkup in the past year, and 84 percent reported their child had a dental exam. About six percent noted that their child had an Individual Education Plan (Figure 7). This is for disabilities or developmental delays.

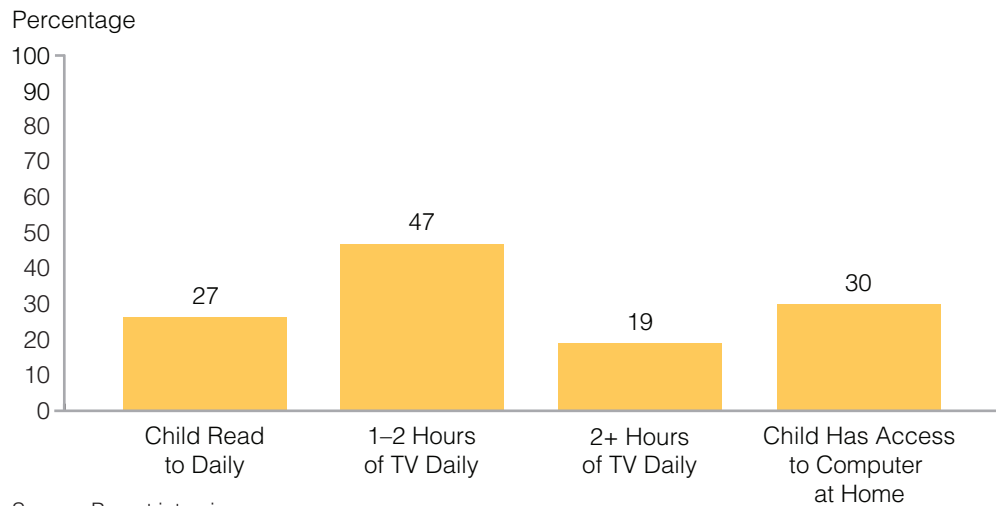




About 27 percent of parents of kindergartners in East Yakima reported reading to their children each day.

Parents reported having an average of 25 children's books at home. This is about the same as across the nation. About 27 percent of parents of kindergartners in East Yakima reported reading to their children each day. Across the nation, about 45 percent of parents read to their children each day. Children all over the U.S. watch television. Children under age 7 may watch from 2 to 2.5 hours per day. In East Yakima, 47 percent of parents said their kindergartner watched 1 to 2 hours of television daily. Nineteen percent reported two or more hours (Figure 8).

Figure 8:  
**Child's Daily Activities in the Home**



Source: Parent interview.

In the U.S., about 78 percent of children age 6 and younger have access to a computer at home. According to East Yakima parents, 30 percent of children have access to a computer at home.

### Family Life: Parents' Report

Parents reported on family routines and discipline in East Yakima. Families have dinner together 5.5 nights a week. Twenty-four percent of parents had spanked their kindergartner in the past week. Sixty-three percent had used "time out." In a national study of Head Start parents, almost half spanked in the past week. More than two-thirds used "time out."

### Readiness for School

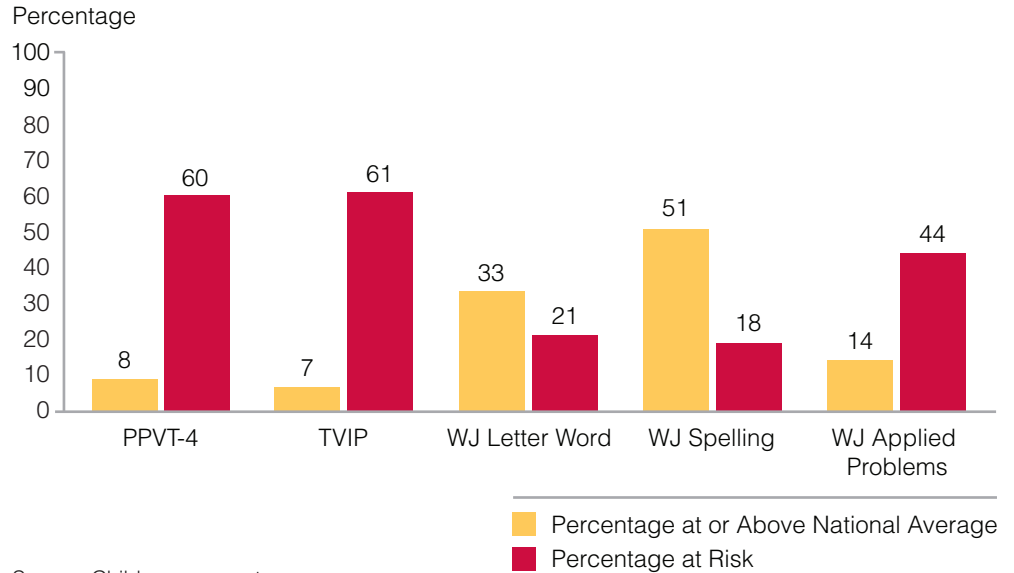
The research team used well-known measures to learn about what children know and can do at the beginning of kindergarten. They tested for what words and letters the children knew. They tested basic math and social skills. Scores can show when children are at risk in their education. About 16 percent of children in the general population have scores that show they may be at risk for poor performance in school.

In one test, the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Fourth Edition (PPVT-4), children chose from four pictures to match words they heard spoken. On average, 8 percent of kindergarten children in East Yakima scored at or above the national average. Sixty percent had scores



**P**arents and teachers rated kindergarten children in East Yakima higher on positive and helpful behaviors and lower on problem behaviors.

Figure 9:  
**Children's Language, Literacy, and Math Skills**



Source: Child assessments.

**Note:** The gold bar shows the percentage of children at or above the national average on each measure. The red bar shows the percentage of children whose scores showed risk. The percentages reported for each measure do not add to 100 because some children scored below the national average, but not so low as to show risk.

that showed risk. All Spanish-speaking children also took the Spanish version of the test (called the TVIP). About 7 percent of these children scored at or above the national average, and 61 percent showed risk (Figure 9).

Another test is the Woodcock-Johnson Letter-Word Identification subtest. It tests for recognizing letters, linking letters to sounds, and reading simple words. Thirty-three percent of children scored at or above the national average. Only 21 percent showed risk.

The Woodcock-Johnson Spelling subtest tests fine motor skills. It also tests for writing letters, words, and phrases. Fifty-one percent of children scored at or above the national average. Eighteen percent showed risk. These scores are much like those in other large studies of similar children, such as the Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES).

The Woodcock-Johnson Applied Problems subtest tests skills in counting, addition, and subtraction. Fourteen percent of children scored at or above the national average, and 44 percent had scores that showed risk.

Parents and teachers rated kindergarten children in East Yakima higher on positive and helpful behaviors and lower on problem behaviors. Child observers rated behavior using the Cognitive-Social Scale of the Leiter Examiner Rating Scale. It looks at social and attention skills. Eighteen percent of children scored below the national average.

Children's health is important for school readiness. Fifty-nine percent of parents rated their child's health as excellent or very good. Eleven percent rated their child's health as fair or poor. Child assessors measured children's height and weight to find their body mass index (BMI). About 50 percent are overweight or at risk for being overweight.



**P**arents in East Yakima said they needed more licensed child care, especially for infants and toddlers and during evening and weekend hours.

## Services in the Community

Parents of young children in East Yakima reported a shortage of services. They need more licensed child care, especially for infants and toddlers and during evening and weekend hours. They reported a lack of programs for parent education and family support. They wanted more adult education programs, especially in Spanish literacy, mental health services, and professional development for child care providers. Parents gave reasons such as language, mistrust of interpreters, and culture for not getting the services they need. Some do not have transportation or do not understand if they qualify for services. Some parents said programs are not open during convenient times. Others said there are long waiting lists. Fear and mistrust of government are other factors.



### KEY FINDINGS ABOUT EAST YAKIMA'S SERVICE DELIVERY SYSTEM

- Preschool services include Head Start, the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), and two school district programs, one of which is a summer program. Most are open only part of the day. There are few full-day spaces.
- There are 14 Head Start, ECEAP, and licensed child care centers. There are 41 family child care homes. All together, they serve about 175 infants and toddlers, as well as 800 preschoolers. Family child care providers have licenses for about 250 children.
- Four programs offer home visiting services for low-income pregnant women—First Steps, the Maternal Child Health program, Nurse/Family Partnership, and Early Head Start.
- Clinics offer parenting education programs, meetings, and workshops. Residents said there are not enough parent education programs in Spanish. There are also not enough programs for fathers.
- Some workshops offer professional development for early learning professionals. A few programs and some child care providers offer staff development.

**M**ost early childhood professionals in East Yakima range in age from mid-30s to early 40s.



**N**one of the infant-toddler teachers and 44 percent of preschool teachers receive health insurance as part of their pay.

## Who Works in the Early Childhood Field?

Most early childhood professionals in East Yakima range in age from mid-30s to early 40s. Most teachers at the centers are Hispanic (54 percent of infant-toddler and preschool teachers). Some teachers are white or of multiple or another race. Seventy-nine percent of center directors are white. Most family child care providers are Hispanic (96 percent). All family child care providers speak a home language other than English.

Most family child care providers (80 percent) in East Yakima do not have a high school degree or GED. Only four percent have a bachelor's degree or higher. In contrast, most infant-toddler and preschool teachers have a high school degree or GED. Seven percent of infant-toddler teachers and 35 percent of preschool teachers have a bachelor's or higher degree. Family child care providers have about seven years of experience. Infant-toddler teachers have about four years, and preschool teachers have about nine years.

Family child care providers earn more pay than center teachers. Family child care providers earn about \$33,059. Infant-toddler teachers earn about \$12,926, and preschool teachers earn about \$21,443. Forty-six percent of family child care providers said their job provides health insurance. None of the infant-toddler teachers and 44 percent of preschool teachers receive health insurance as part of their pay.

## Quality Counts

Mathematica interviewers used the well-known Environmental Rating Scales to study child care settings. These scales are for different age groups and types of child care. Items are rated from 1 to 7, with 1 for inadequate and 7 for excellent.

The average Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale-Revised score in East Yakima was 3.3. This was in the minimal-to-good quality range. Scores ranged from 1.5 to 5.2; 31 percent of family child care scores were in the inadequate-to-minimal range. Sixty-six percent were in the minimal-to-good range, and four percent were in the good-to-excellent range. On average, there were 2.4 children per caregiver. The group size was about 3.5 children.

The average Infant-Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised score was 3.5 (ranging from 1.9 to 5.8). This was in the minimal-to-good range. About 14 percent were in the inadequate-to-minimal range. Seventy-nine percent were in the minimal-to-good range. Seven percent were in the good-to-excellent range. On average, there were about 4.3 children per teacher. The group size was about six children.

The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised scores child care classrooms serving preschoolers. The average was 4.5 (with a range of 1.9 to 6.0). This was in the minimal-to-good range. About 16 percent rated inadequate-to-minimal. Four percent rated minimal-to-good, and 43 percent rated good-to-excellent. On average, there were six children per teacher. The average group size was about 12.4 children.

**I**n spring 2006, the Gates Foundation chose East Yakima as an Early Learning Initiative community.



## Planning for the Future

To help plan for the future, the Gates Foundation consulted with Yakima's Investing in Children Committee. In spring 2006, the foundation chose East Yakima as an Early Learning Initiative community. Yakima has about 84,000 residents. The East Yakima neighborhood is home to about 28,000 residents and has about 3,000 children age 5 or younger. Nearly two-thirds of residents are Hispanic. More than half speak Spanish at home. The population has a high rate of poverty and low education. It is said that families in East Yakima work hard and care greatly about the health and well-being of their children.

In August 2006, a group of 42 community organizations chose Educational Service District 105 to lead the planning process, along with many local service providers, leaders, and parents. Planners learned about community needs in East Yakima in fall 2006. They talked to more than 120 professionals, parents, and community members in 2007. Twenty-seven parent representatives were part of the group that wrote a plan for Thrive by Five Washington in August 2007. A nonprofit organization, Ready by Five, was formed to put the initiative into practice with the help of Educational Service District 105.

### GOALS FOR THE EAST YAKIMA EARLY LEARNING INITIATIVE

- All children in East Yakima will be ready for school.
- Families will be supported and empowered to be their children's first teachers.
- Professional development opportunities will be available to early learning providers. This will include training, mentoring, and resources.
- The East Yakima community will understand the value of early learning. It will take responsibility for advancing early learning opportunities for children.
- Ready by Five will become a model others can use. It will be an example of how to deliver in-depth, coordinated early learning services.

**T**he main lesson learned from the study so far is that high-quality early learning services may be able to help East Yakima children get ready for kindergarten.

## Looking to the Future

Now we know more about the strengths and needs of children and families in East Yakima. Many new kindergartners are at levels well below national averages. This means they may not do well in school in the future.

The main lesson learned from the study so far is that high-quality early learning services may be able to help East Yakima children get ready for kindergarten. The information from the study can help the community plan for changes in how it delivers services in the future.

The East Yakima community can help children prepare better for school in many areas. The greatest need is in vocabulary, math skills, and physical health. Services that focus on both home and out-of-home care can help. Out-of-home care may help children develop in new ways. Services to support parenting and learning at home can help parents be their children's first teachers.

Thrive by Five Washington and Ready by Five are taking the first steps to improve early care and education settings. They are also working to improve home visiting programs to support parents. More information will be gathered as plans are made. Working together with people from the community, they can help build and strengthen programs that prepare children for school.

Full reports from the study can be seen at [www.mathematica-mpr.com](http://www.mathematica-mpr.com). The Gates Foundation report, "Investing in Children: An Early Learning Strategy for Washington," is available on the web at [www.gatesfoundation.org](http://www.gatesfoundation.org).



Thrive by Five is a trademark of financial literacy programs for preschoolers supported by Credit Union National Association, Inc. (“CUNA”) and it is not affiliated with Thrive by Five Washington. Learn more at <http://www.creditunion.coop/thriveby5/>.

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