

SAFETY NET

“Our Homeless Child Care Program provides families with short-term child care subsidy, placement into high quality, licensed child care programs, and customized service coordination with other resources. It provides children in crisis a safe and stimulating environment with routines, structure, and opportunities to thrive, while enabling their parents to maintain momentum in addressing housing, employment, and health challenges. Research on childhood homelessness and associated traumas reveals a profound and accumulative negative effect on the development of children—inhibiting their emotional, cognitive, and behavioral development, and leading many to repeat the cycle of homelessness as adults.

In July 2017, the Department of Social and Health Services’ Working Connections Child Care began offering homeless families a four-month grace period to meet the normal eligibility requirements of the state child care subsidy.

However, we’ve identified two significant challenges faced by families who do qualify for public child care subsidy. First, about 25 percent cannot find child care slots in our high-demand market, mainly due to low subsidy reimbursement rates. Another hurdle is high monthly child care co-payments that employed families are charged—sometimes as high as \$700/month. These co-payments are often burdensome enough to threaten any housing stability that families are able to achieve. As a result, Childcare Resources has started using our safety-net subsidy pool to assist some families with their co-payments.

Childcare is expensive, and many families end up needing several months of safety net child care subsidy funding. Thanks to very generous local philanthropy, there was some funding available to expand our Homeless Child Care Program into Pierce County in 2017. These initial investments highlight the impressive

commitment of this community to our most vulnerable children and families.”

Katie Kaiser is the Homeless Child Care Program Manager at Child Care Resources



EARLY LEARNING

PARTICIPATION IN QUALITY PRESCHOOLS

Like much of the region, Tacoma is in a child care crisis. Since 2015, increasing costs to providers and families, child care center consolidation, and closures have led to an almost 50 percent drop in available quality care in Tacoma. As the cost for licensed providers to stay in business grows, so does the cost to families. Tracking total enrollment is difficult, particularly for the unlicensed market, but we are able to report licensed provider capacity information from Child Care Resources. A recent small increase in capacity is unlikely to reverse the trend. Furthermore, the decline is even greater for Licensed Family Child Care providers.

Tacoma Public Schools offers subsidized, half-day preschool programs for children ages 3 to 4 at 30 of their 35 elementary schools. They also operate four additional early learning centers. While capacity fluctuates annually based on the number of federal slots allocated to the district, TPS fills an important gap and has continued to increase staff and facility capacity to offer quality early learning for Tacoma kids. However, with 13,000 Tacoma children under the age of 5, the need for accessible, affordable child care far exceeds what TPS can provide in addition to K-12 education.

Reaching Low-Income Students & Students of Color

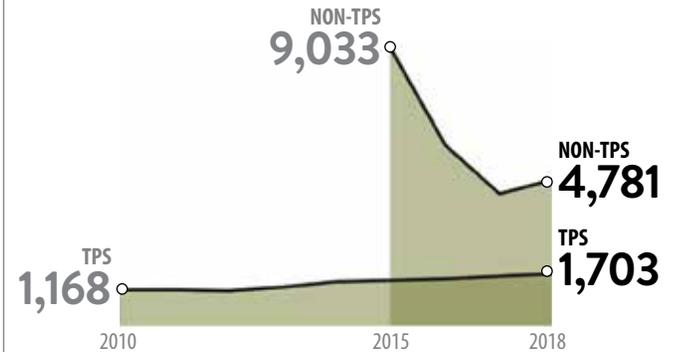
The decline in licensed care is even greater among providers accepting child care subsidies, disproportionately impacting low-income students and families of color. While enrollment at TPS preschools has grown to 1,703 students — a 46 percent increase from the 2010 baseline — low-income communities of color have lower rates of children in care. TPS preschool enrollment for Black students has declined 16 percent from 2010-11, a greater decline than in TPS overall. Most notably, enrollment of pre-K students in poverty has dropped 13 percent, as opposed to the 7 percent drop occurring in K-12 over the same time period.

Enrollment trends for certain demographic and economic groups will continue to reflect the available capacity — or lack of availability — in schools and zip codes where those groups are concentrated. This underscores the potential positive impact of increased satellite programming and community partnerships where families need them most.

*Child Care Resources tracks the available capacity for non-TPS pre-K programs.

DATA TRENDS

TPS PRE-K ENROLLMENT VS. NON-TPS PRE-K CAPACITY *



AIMING HIGHER GOAL: Increase the number of children attending Tacoma Public Schools or community child care/preschools that meet quality standards.

TPS PRE-K ENROLLMENT VS. NON-TPS PRE-K CAPACITY BY ZIP CODE

This graph shows highest TPS enrollment and greatest non-TPS capacity in Tacoma’s downtown, central, and eastside zip codes.

