
Child Care Facilities and Licensing

*Senate Local Government Committee
Thursday, December 4, 2025*

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and*

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Washington State Department of
CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES



DCYF's Role

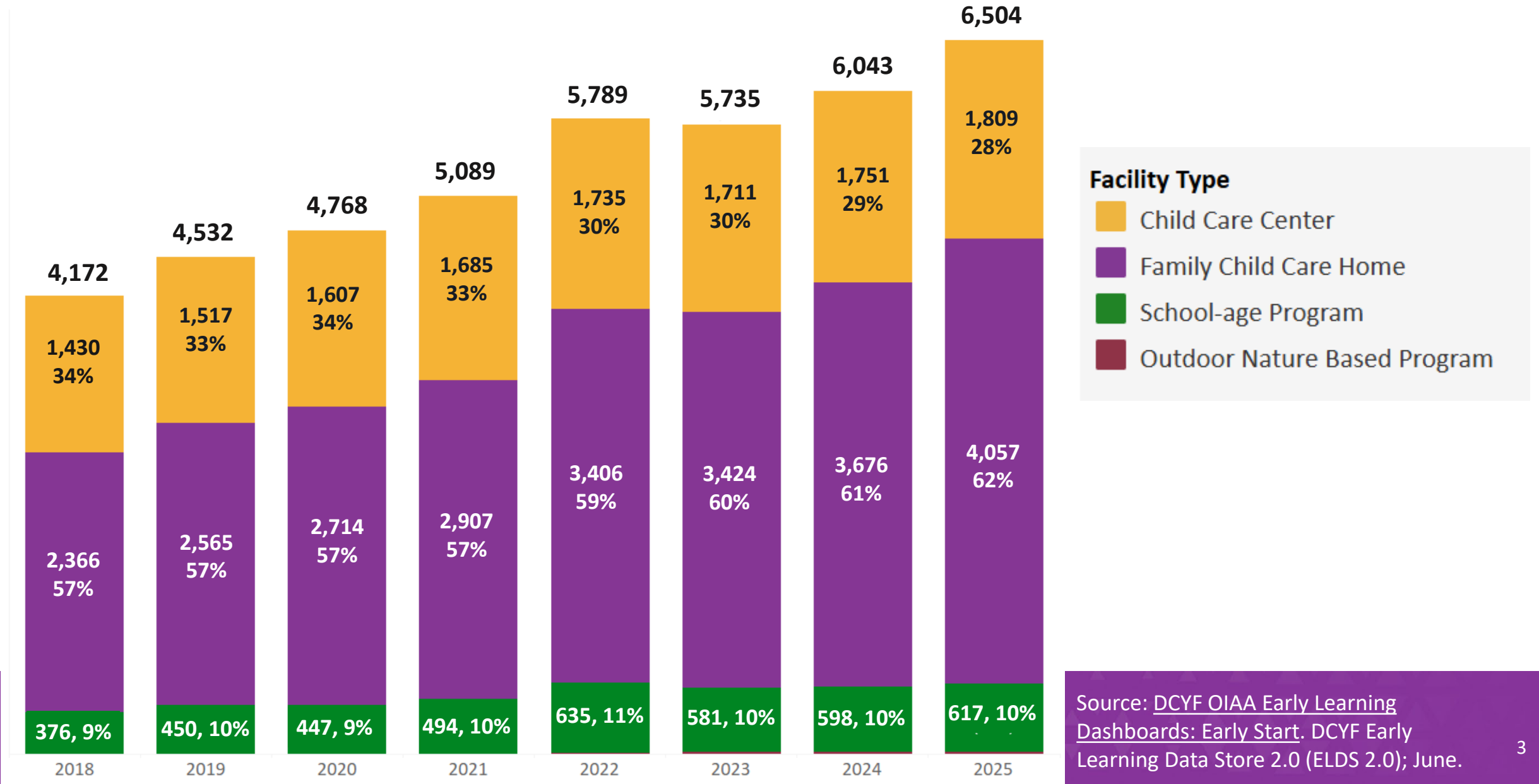
DCYF's primary duty is to ensure **child-safety and well-being** through licensing, monitoring, compliance, and technical assistance for child care providers.

DCYF also ensures children have **high-quality early learning experiences** to help them develop the skills to be successful in school and life, by supporting early learning professionals and helping families find high quality care.

When it comes to siting facilities, DCYF supports providers through **technical assistance and resources** to help them navigate complex requirements at the state and local levels.

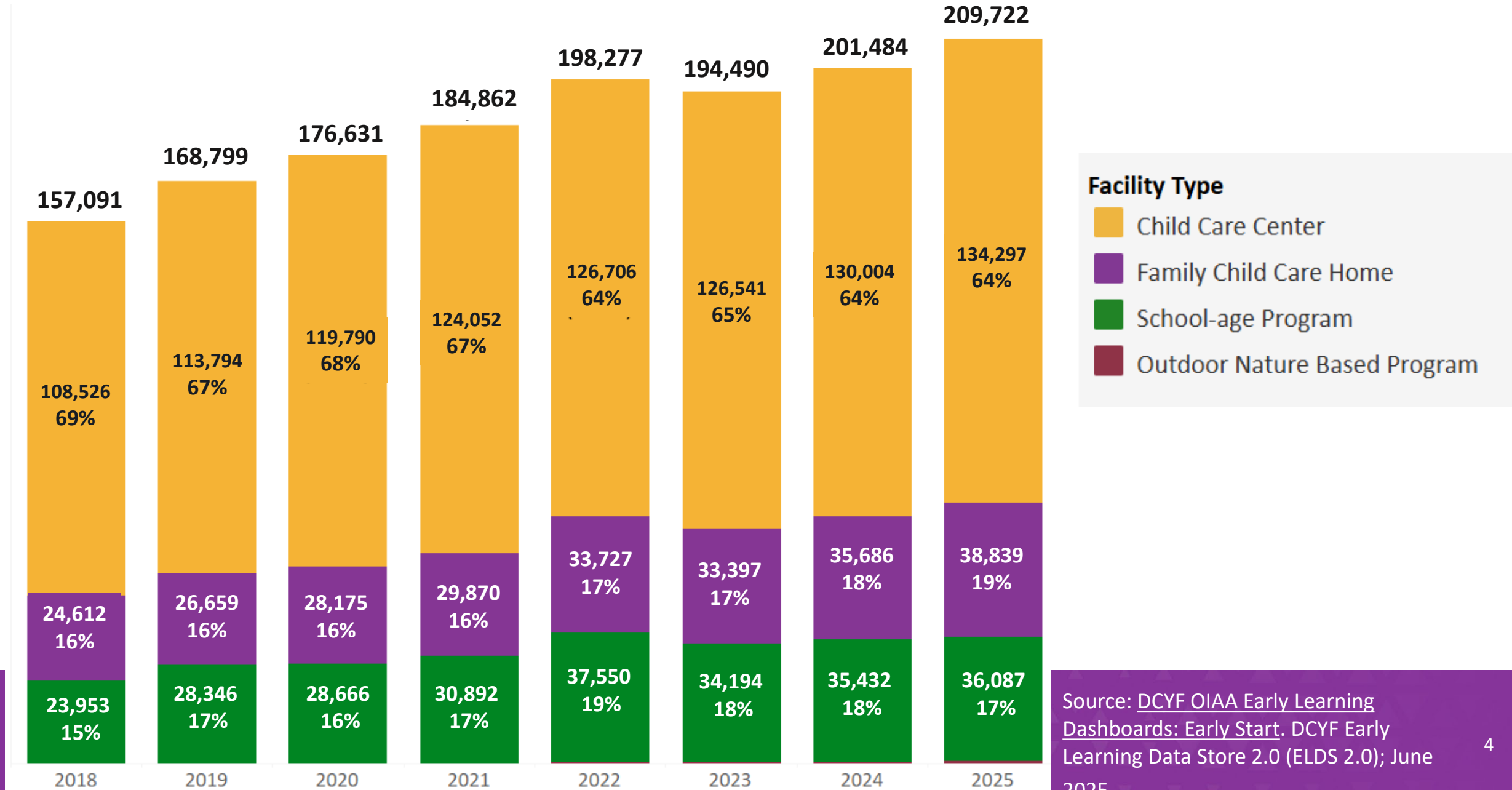


The number of licensed providers is increasing



Source: [DCYF OIAA Early Learning Dashboards: Early Start](#). DCYF Early Learning Data Store 2.0 (ELDS 2.0); June. 2025.

Licensed capacity is increasing





Challenges to Child Care Access

Child care providers face delays because they must navigate two separate systems at the same time: local city and county permitting and zoning rules, and state requirements such as DCYF licensing standards.

Facility development can be complex and costly, and more resources are needed to help providers navigate these systems.



Child Care Provider Voices: Key Messages

Hearing from Providers About Local Government

- Slow or Unclear Process
- Inconsistent requirements by jurisdiction
- Facilities face costly and unexpected upgrades
- Parking rules and zoning limit growth
- Communication varies widely
- Frequent frustration with obtaining the certificate of occupancy



DCYF's Pre-licensing Unit - Supporting Child Care Providers

Supporting Early Learning Facilities Development and Expansion

- Online Orientation
- Technical Facilities Support
- Direct Support from DCYF Licensors
- Easy Access to Licensing Forms and Guides
- Training and Professional Development

“Pre-licensing services helped me avoid mistakes, stay compliant, and move through the licensing process with confidence. For a first-time center applicant like me, the support was not only helpful but critical. I am very grateful for the clear communication, cultural understanding, and professional guidance provided during this process.”

- Little Caterpillar Academy, Issaquah, WA.

Local Government Perspectives on Child Care Permitting

Hearing from Local Government

- Local governments want providers to contact them early.
- Local governments want guidance on how licensing requirements connect to local rules.
 - *Yakima County Planner's office reached out to DCYF to better understand land use approval requirements for Outdoor Nature Base programs.*
- Not all local governments have resources for those interested in opening or expanding child care programs.



Exploration of Early Care and Education Facilities Project

Future DCYF Plans to Support Early Learning Facilities Development and Expansion

- **Goal:** Build a sustainable, scalable approach to facility expansion that supports providers, families, and communities across Washington.
- **Outcomes:** Inform future funding, policy, and facility support. Current work includes:
 - Identifying facility challenges and barriers child care providers face.
 - Understanding which government entities can best influence the challenges and barriers child care providers facing.
 - **Deliverables:** literature catalog of statewide research, analyzing financing needs, studying building and safety codes, interviewing providers, and conducting a statewide survey.
- **Impacts:** Results in DCYF providing clearer guidance and partner to reduce permitting and licensing barriers so more child care facilities can open successfully.
- Actionable implementation plan expected **Summer 2026**.

THANK YOU

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Thank you