Washington State Early Learning Career Pathways

Job seekers & career changers · Entry-level through leadership · Spokane Region · WAC 110-300-0100 (amended Aug 1, 2026) · HB 1648

SPOKANE WORKFORCE COUNCIL
Skilled employees • Thriving businesses • Strong community

All WA licensed child care staff register in MERIT (merit.dcyf.wa.gov) and meet WAC 110-300-0100. Most roles can be hired with a HS diploma/GED and earn credentials on the job.

LEVEL 1 · AIDE / CLASSROOM ASSISTANT
Aide / Classroom Assistant

No degree required - start here

Classroom Aide | Volunteer

Requirements:

- Age 14+ · HS diploma or GED, or currently enrolled in high school
- Background check · TB screening · register in MERIT
- Child Care Basics + preservice trainings before working unsupervised
- Works under the continuous oversight of a teacher or director
- 10 hrs/yr in-service after 12 months (if working 20+ hrs/month)

~$17-18/hr est. wage

LEVEL 2 · ASSISTANT TEACHER
Assistant Teacher

ECE Initial Cert (12 credits) - earn it on the job

Assistant Teacher

Requirements:

- Age 18+ · HS diploma or GED at hire
- ECE Initial Certificate (12 credits) or equivalent - current CDA, PACE, or 13 Military Modules
- **Initial Cert due by Aug 1, 2030 or within 5 yrs of hire - whichever is later**
- Registered in MERIT · preservice health & safety trainings
- 10 hrs/yr in-service after 12 months of employment

$18-19/hr est. wage

LEVEL 3 · LEAD TEACHER
Lead Teacher

ECE Short Certificate (20 total credits)

Lead Teacher | Primary Caregiver | Family Home Licensee

Requirements:

- Age 18+ · HS diploma or GED at hire
- **Initial Cert by Aug 1, 2030 or within 5 yrs of hire (whichever is later), then Short Cert within 2 yrs of the Initial**
- Short Cert = Initial + 8 credits · choose a specialization (e.g., General, Infant-Toddler, School-Age)
- Family home lead teachers: Initial Cert only
- Equivalents: CDA + 8 credits, PACE, or degree with 30 aligned ECE credits

$19-23/hr est. wage

LEVEL 4 · PROGRAM SUPERVISOR / ASST. DIRECTOR
Program Supervisor / Asst. Director

ECE State Certificate (47 total credits)

Program Supervisor | Assistant Director

Requirements:

- Age 18+ · State Cert or equivalent by Aug 1, 2030 (asst. directors hired later: within 5 yrs of hire)
- **At hire: State Cert OR 10 / 25 / 45 ECE credits for centers licensed for 12 or fewer / 13-24 / 25+ children**
- Program Supervisor: 2 yrs teaching experience
- Asst. Director: 2 yrs teaching OR 2 yrs admin/management, or approved plan
- Equivalent: associate+ degree with 30 aligned ECE credits

$21-27/hr est. wage

LEVEL 5 · CENTER DIRECTOR / PROGRAM DIRECTOR
Center / Program Director

ECE State Certificate + experience, or equivalent

Center Director | Program Director

Requirements:

- Age 18+ · State Cert or equivalent by Aug 1, 2030; new hires within 5 yrs of hire
- **At hire: State Cert OR 10 / 25 / 45 ECE credits based on licensed capacity**
- 2 yrs teaching experience + 6 months admin/management (or DCYF-approved plan)
- Equivalent: bachelor's in ECE, or related bachelor's (recognized major or 30 aligned ECE credits)
- If not yet qualified, center must employ a qualified asst. director or program supervisor

$24-38/hr est. wage

LEVEL 6 · ADVANCED & LEADERSHIP ROLES
Advanced & Leadership Roles

Bachelor's required · Master's preferred for specialists

Public School P-3 Teacher | ECE Coach / QRIS | Blended ECE-SPED

Requirements:

- Public school P-3: BAE with P-3 endorsement (EWU, WWU) + WA Residency Teaching Certificate
- Basic skills test (WEST-B, SAT, or ACT - no minimum score) + ECE content test (NES)
- ECEAP Coach: bachelor's in ECE or related field
- Other non-school roles: bachelor's + 30+ ECE credits

$30-60+/hr est. wage

Spokane Workforce Council is an equal opportunity employer/program. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities. Washington Relay Service: 711.
Our programs receive support and funding from various US Department of Labor grants. Read more about our USDOL grant funding at spokaneworkforce.org/funding

Verify requirements at merit.dcyf.wa.gov · WAC 110-300-0100 (effective Aug 1, 2026)

Your Education Ladder - Every Credit Stacks

WA stackable credentials from free training to graduate degrees · WAC 110-300-0100 · Nothing you earn is wasted

SPOKANE WORKFORCE COUNCIL
Skilled employees • Thriving businesses • Strong community

WA STATE STACKABLE CERTIFICATES & DEGREES

EVERY CREDIT COUNTS TOWARD THE NEXT LEVEL

M.Ed. / Graduate Certificate
49 credit hrs · online at EWU
→ **Coach · Specialist · Administrator**

BAE + WA Teaching Certificate
bachelor's degree · EWU / WWU
→ **Public School P-3 Teacher**

AAS / AAS-T Degree
~90 credits - all certificate credits included
→ **Director · transfer path to university**

ECE State Certificate
+27 credits = 47 total
→ **Program Supervisor · Asst. Director · Director**

ECE Short Certificate
+8 credits = 20 total
→ **Lead Teacher · Family Home Licensee**

ECE Initial Certificate
12 college credits (a current CDA or PACE also counts)
→ **Assistant Teacher · first step for Lead Teachers**

START: Child Care Basics
30 hours · free & online (dcyftraining.com)
→ **Required for all roles · start as Aide / Classroom Assistant**

ALTERNATIVE & EQUIVALENT PATHWAYS

Child Development Associate (CDA)

- Nationally recognized credential · self-paced & online options
- A current CDA = ECE Initial Certificate
- CDA + 8 aligned credits = Short Cert · CDA + 35 = State Cert
- Must be kept current (renewed) to count in MERIT
- DCYF equivalency, not college credit - ask your college

PACE - Provider Access to a Community Equivalent

- Community-based training = Initial + Short Cert equivalent
- For Assistant Teachers, Lead Teachers & Family Home Licensees
- Prerequisites: Child Care Basics + EQEL · instructor-led
- Find PACE 1, 2, 3 in MERIT under 'Find Training'

Experience-Based Competency (HB 1648)

- **Hired before Aug 1, 2025 + 5 yrs experience by Aug 1, 2030**
- Applies to roles requiring Initial, Short, or State Certificate
- Does NOT meet ECEAP requirements or earn Early Achievers education points
- Apply in MERIT: 'I want to use my experience and training'

Related Degrees & Other Equivalents

- Human Dev., Child Dev., or Child & Family Studies degree incl. an ECE curriculum course + guidance or practicum course
- OR any associate+ degree with 30 aligned ECE credits
- Montessori credentials (MACTE, AMI, AMS) recognized
- Military: 13 Military Modules = Initial Certificate

MERIT Workforce Registry - Required for All

- ALL WA licensed providers must register · free
- Tracks education progress toward role qualifications
- Submit an education application to verify degrees & credits
- Questions: MERIT@dcyf.wa.gov · 1-866-482-4325, option 5

Spokane Workforce Council is an equal opportunity employer/program. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities. Washington Relay Service: 711.
Our programs receive support and funding from various US Department of Labor grants. Read more about our USDOL grant funding at spokaneworkforce.org/funding

University Transfer, Degrees & Graduate Programs

AAS-T transfer paths · teaching certification · graduate study · plus a guide to all those acronyms

AAS-T → BACHELOR'S TRANSFER PATHS

SFCC
AAS-T in ECE
~90 credits · fully online

EWU · BAE in Early Childhood Education

P-3 endorsement (preschool - grade 3) + teaching certificate

EWU · Blended ECE + Special Ed BAE

ECE (P-3) + Early Childhood Special Ed (birth - grade 3)

WSU · Human Development BA

+ ECE Certificate (does not lead to a teaching certificate)

WWU · Early Childhood Education P-3 BAE

P-3 teacher certification · dual ECE/ECSE option

Bachelor of Arts in Education (BAE) - EWU · WWU

- Leads to WA Residency Teaching Certificate
- ECE Endorsement: Preschool through Grade 3 (P-3)
- Admission: basic skills test (WEST-B, SAT, or ACT - no minimum score) + prerequisite courses
- Pass the ECE content test (NES) for the endorsement

WA State Teaching Certificate (OSPI · PESB)

- Required for WA public school teaching
- Residency (first tier) → Professional (second tier)
- Approved teacher prep program + basic skills test + content test (edTPA no longer required since 2021)
- Private/nonprofit child care & ECEAP: NOT required
- Add Elementary K-8 endorsement to extend range

Graduate Programs (M.Ed. & Grad Cert - EWU)

- M.Ed. in ECE Online - 14 courses / 49 credit hrs
- Online ECE Graduate Certificate also offered
- No teaching certificate required for admission
- **Does NOT lead to an initial teaching certificate**
- Current teachers: qualifies for P-3 add-on endorsement
- Opens: ECE Coach, QRIS Specialist, Administrator roles

ACRONYM GUIDE - WHAT ALL THOSE LETTERS MEAN

AAS / AAS-T Associate of Applied Science (-Transfer)

BAE Bachelor of Arts in Education

CCB Child Care Basics (30-hr training)

CDA Child Development Associate credential

DCYF WA Dept. of Children, Youth & Families

ECE Early Childhood Education

ECEAP Early Childhood Education & Assistance Program

ECSE Early Childhood Special Education

EQEL Enhancing Quality of Early Learning training

FAFSA / WASFA federal & WA financial aid forms

HB 1648 2025 law extending qualification timelines

M.Ed. Master of Education

MERIT Managed Education & Registry Information Tool

NES National Evaluation Series (content test)

OSPI Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

PACE Provider Access to a Community Equivalent

PESB Professional Educator Standards Board

P-3 Preschool through Grade 3 (endorsement)

QRIS Quality Rating & Improvement System

SPED Special Education

WAC Washington Administrative Code

WEST-B WA Educator Skills Test - Basic

Spokane Region Programs

- SFCC: Initial/Short/State Certs, AAS & AAS-T - fully online · sfcc.spokane.edu
- Early Achievers Grant: SFCC.EarlyAchievers@sfcc.spokane.edu · 509-533-3942
- SCC: Early Childhood Education class for English learners · scc.spokane.edu
- EWU: BAE, Grad Cert, M.Ed. · ewu.edu/cpp/education
- WSU: Human Development BA + ECE Certificate · hd.wsu.edu
- Spokane Colleges Head Start/ECEAP: 30+ centers · ccs.spokane.edu

Spokane Workforce Council is an equal opportunity employer/program. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities. Washington Relay Service: 711.
Our programs receive support and funding from various US Department of Labor grants. Read more about our USDOL grant funding at spokaneworkforce.org/funding

SFCC sfcc.spokane.edu · EWU ewu.edu · WSU hd.wsu.edu · WWU wwu.edu · MERIT merit.dcyf.wa.gov

Specialized Career Tracks, Training Requirements & Next Steps

Washington State Early Learning - Spokane County · September 2026

SPOKANE WORKFORCE COUNCIL
Skilled employees • Thriving businesses • Strong community

SPECIALIZED CAREER TRACKS

Watch local career videos & see real Spokane wage data at careerexplorenw.org - search 'Early Childhood Teacher'

Special Ed / Blended ECE-SPED

- EWU & WWU blended BAE: ECE (P-3) + Early Childhood Special Ed (birth - grade 3)
- WA Teaching Certificate required for public schools
- Add-on SPED endorsement extends range to age 21
- High demand - strong employment outlook
- Pay: certificated teacher salary schedule (check district)

Infant-Toddler Specialist

- Short Cert specialization: Infant-Toddler Care
- Focuses on birth-36 months development
- High demand in licensed centers & Early Head Start
- CDA Infant-Toddler specialization also available
- Wage premium offered in some programs

Dual Language / ELL Support

- Bilingual ECE specialists in strong demand
- Salish School of Spokane (Indigenous languages)
- Spanish-English programs widely needed in Spokane
- Language proficiency + ECE cert required
- Add-on ESL/ELL endorsement available with BAE

ECEAP / Head Start Teacher

- Spokane Colleges: 30+ Head Start/ECEAP/EHS centers
- ECEAP Lead Teacher: associate+ degree in ECE (or DCYF equivalent)
- ECEAP Assistant Teacher: ECE Initial Certificate or higher
- Not fully qualified? Hire with HS diploma + 5-year PDP
- Meet ECEAP Performance Standards (+ WAC 110-300 if licensed) · Apply: ccs.spokane.edu

Home Visitor / Family Support

- Connects families to early learning resources
- ECEAP Family Support Staff: associate+ degree with 30 related credits
- OR WA ECE Home Visitor Certificate or Home Visitor CDA
- SFCC offers a Short Cert in Home Visitor/Family Engagement
- Strong entry point into the ECE career ladder

ECE Coach / Quality Specialist

- Supports provider quality improvement
- Washington Early Achievers / QRIS coaching roles
- ECEAP Coach: bachelor's in ECE or related field
- Teaching experience strongly preferred
- Early Achievers coaches work with Child Care Aware of WA regional partners (Child Care Aware of Eastern WA)

ONGOING TRAINING REQUIREMENTS (WAC 110-300-0105, -0106 & -0107 - LICENSED CHILD CARE)

Pre-Service (within 3 months of hire)

- Register in MERIT before working unsupervised
- **Child Care Basics: BEFORE working unsupervised**
- First Aid/CPR, abuse & neglect reporting, emergency prep, bloodborne pathogens, serving children experiencing homelessness
- Infant care: Safe Sleep (annually) · food worker card if serving food
- Free online trainings: dcyftraining.com · merit.dcyf.wa.gov

In-Service (10 hrs minimum every year)

- 10 hrs/year after 12 months of employment
- Up to 5 extra hours may carry over to the next year
- EQEL (20 hrs over 2 yrs): complete within 36 months of a new role; counts toward in-service
- Directors, supervisors & FH licensees: 10 hrs child development + 10 hrs leadership every 3 yrs after EQEL
- ECEAP staff: 20 hrs/yr (lead) · 15 hrs/yr (assistant)

Qualification Timelines (HB 1648)

- Hired without the full credential? You have time to earn it
- Hired on/after Aug 1, 2025: within 5 years of hire
- **Hired before Aug 1, 2025: by Aug 1, 2030**
- Lead teachers: Short Cert within 2 yrs of the Initial
- Progress documented annually and tracked in MERIT

FINANCIAL SUPPORT & YOUR NEXT STEPS

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Early Achievers Grant

Tuition & books for ECE certs/AAS · for staff working at an Early Achievers site · apply at SFCC BEFORE enrolling · Kim Rector 509-533-3942

FAFSA / WASFA / State Aid

Financial aid at SFCC & EWU · Running Start for HS students

1 Register in MERIT

merit.dcyf.wa.gov - required for all WA child care staff. Record your education & training here.

2 Find your requirement

Review WAC 110-300-0100 for your role. Most roles: get hired now, earn the credential within 5 yrs.

3 Start training

Free 30-hour Child Care Basics at dcyftraining.com. SFCC Initial Cert is the fastest credential.

4 Get funding first

Working at an Early Achievers site? Apply for the EA grant at SFCC BEFORE enrolling.

KEY RESOURCES

Career Explore NW: careerexplorenw.org
MERIT: merit.dcyf.wa.gov
DCYF Portal: ececareers.dcyf.wa.gov
SFCC: sfcc.spokane.edu · 509-533-3942
EWU: ewu.edu/cpp/education
WAC 110-300: app.leg.wa.gov/wac
DCYF Training: dcyftraining.com
Spokane WFC: spokaneworkforce.org

Spokane Workforce Council is an equal opportunity employer/program. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities. Washington Relay Service: 711.
Our programs receive support and funding from various US Department of Labor grants. Read more about our USDOL grant funding at spokaneworkforce.org/funding