

A SUMMARY OF:

A Needs Assessment of Alaska's Mixed-Delivery System of Early Childhood Care and Education

December 2019

Alaska's early childhood care and education system assessment focuses on strengths and needs, particularly for rural, disadvantaged and low-income children prenatal through age 8. The report informs efforts to improve the quality, availability and affordability of services for all Alaska children.



"Quality early childhood education can compensate for developmental delays, boost earnings, and reduce inequality."

- James Heckman, Nobel Prize-winning economist

Research Shows Quality Early Care and Education...

- ▶ Helps close achievement gaps so all children can thrive
- ▶ Enables parents and caregivers to work or study and increases economic mobility
- ▶ Underpins a robust economy
- ▶ Reduces need for special education
- ▶ Improves lifelong health and reduces rates of crime in adulthood



The needs assessment, sources, and appendices are available at

www.earlychildhoodalaska.com

The needs assessment was made possible by a Preschool Development Grant (PDG B-5) awarded to the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development in partnership with the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Grant Number 90TP0012 from the Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Office of Child Care, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Children in Alaska

94,000

children birth through age 8; **13%** of state population

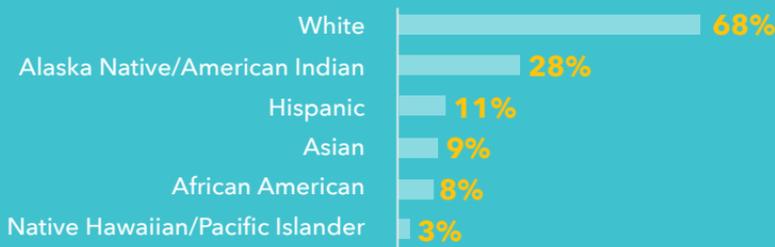
19%

of children live in rural Alaska

13%

of children speak a language other than English at home; **23%** in rural Alaska

Alaska Children Ages 0-18 Identify As (may select more than one)



Alaska Child Health and Well-Being

Ages 0-3

Developmental screening

Child development questionnaire completed with health care provider in past 12 months

Urban

82%

Rural

47%

Food security

Ever enrolled in WIC

48%

79%

Special needs and care

Ever enrolled in Early Intervention

6%

16%

Foundation for learning

Ever enrolled in Head Start or Early Head Start

5%

20%

Economic Status

15% of Alaska children birth through 5 years of age live in poverty; **29%** in rural areas live in poverty

About **10%** of children in Head Start/Early Head Start are homeless

Kindergarten Readiness

About **1/3** of Alaska kindergarteners meet 11 of 13 Alaska Developmental Profile standards, the standard for proficiency



Alaska's Early Care & Education System

is a network of health, social services, child care, and education programs and services that support lifelong learning and well-being for young children and their families, including:

- ▶ Government-regulated early intervention, home visiting, and care and education providers
- ▶ Tribal-approved care and education providers and other tribal programs
- ▶ Head Start and Early Head Start
- ▶ Public pre-kindergarten and public schools
- ▶ Private exempt providers
- ▶ Before and after-school programs
- ▶ Providers who are not regulated, mainly providing child care
- ▶ Health (physical, mental, dental) and social services

Early Care and Education Need



32,200 children are typically in early care and education programs



Another **14,400** children need care because all adults in the home are in the workforce

- ▶ Includes **3,700** in rural Alaska
- ▶ Includes **4,800** in low-income families



In **22%** of Alaska households with children, an adult is not employed or works fewer hours than they otherwise would due to a lack of child care

Some military and tribal child care spaces may not be counted due to data collection barriers.

Unmet Need by Borough

% of total population with outstanding need



Accessibility, Affordability, Quality

Families are looking for early childhood programs that are...

Accessible and Available - locations and schedules work for families

Affordable - families can cover costs without undue hardship

Quality - programs are safe and meet families' expectations

Alaska Cost of Licensed Child Care as a Percent of Household Income



12%

Married couple households



23%

Single male households



34%

Single female households

The federal government says affordable care costs no more than 7% of a family's income.

Average Alaska Child Care Space Costs Per Year



\$12,000

Most Important Barriers to Finding Child Care in Alaska

● Statewide ● Urban ● Rural



Results from Alaska households with adult not employed or working fewer hours than they otherwise would due to lack of child care.

Surveys show all families prioritize quality, but low-income families are often forced to compromise due to limited availability and high costs.



Early Care and Education Funding

- ▶ The U.S. and Alaska spend about **0.5%** of GDP on early care and education.
- ▶ The U.S. ranks **36th** of the 39 “developed” (OECD) nations in spending on early care and education as a percent of GDP.
- ▶ In Alaska, **household spending** is the largest source of early care and education funding.

Spending on Alaska Early Care and Education Programs and Services

(U.S.\$ million)



\$133M

Federal



\$22M

State



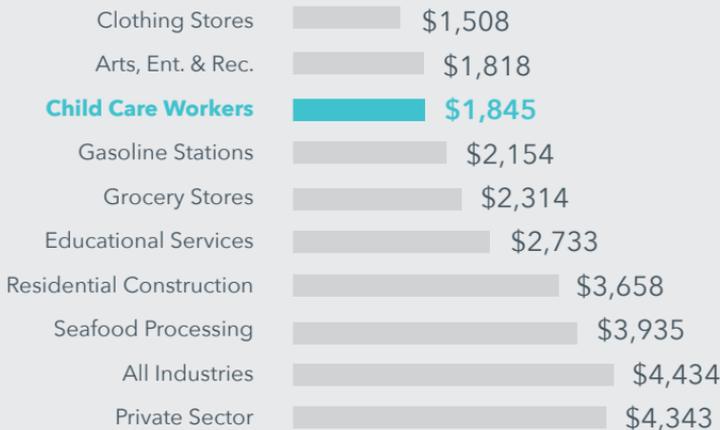
\$214M

Household

Alaska's Early Childhood Workforce

7,200 full and part-time jobs in 2019

Average Monthly Wages for Select Alaska Sectors, 2017



- ▶ Wages of early childhood professionals are among the lowest in the Alaska economy, at about **40%** of average monthly private sector wages.
- ▶ Alaska early childhood workforce wages are **15% below** the national average for purchasing power.
- ▶ There is **high turnover** (43% annually) in the early childhood workforce.
- ▶ More affordable and flexible training opportunities are needed.
- ▶ Pre-K teachers are paid less than other education professionals with similar credentials.

Strengthening Early Care and Education in Alaska

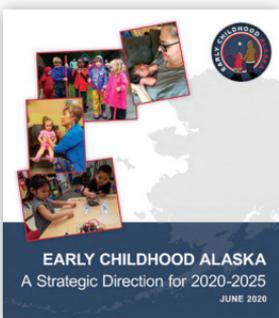


Core Strengths:

- ▶ Rich cultural traditions and strong ties among extended family members and communities
- ▶ Strong tribal governance and services system
- ▶ Existing network of early literacy, home visiting, workforce development, and child care referral and training programs
- ▶ Tradition of varied education approaches such as homeschool, distance education, and charter and alternative schools
- ▶ Passionate advocates and educators dedicated to improving the lives of young children

Considerations for Improvement:

- ▶ Establish a shared vision for an early childhood education system that prioritizes accessible, affordable, quality services for all families.
- ▶ Improve data collection and sharing to enable better program and policy evaluation and alignment across programs.
- ▶ Increase autonomy and flexibility for providers and programs.
- ▶ Increase investment in early childhood and use transparent and equitable funding processes.
- ▶ Promote partnerships among the public sector, private sector, tribes, and economic development entities to boost funding and better meet Alaskans' needs.
- ▶ Strengthen and fund a strong early childhood governing body for coordination and policy development.
- ▶ Expand availability and flexibility of early childhood workforce education and training.
- ▶ Fund and build Alaska's Quality Recognition and Improvement System into an effective driver of quality.



Alaska's early childhood strategic plan was based on findings and considerations from the needs assessment. **Early Childhood Alaska: A Strategic Direction for 2020-2025**, June 2020 is available at www.earlychildhoodalaska.com

