



Stellar Group

Research | Strategy | Impact

# City of Valdez

## EARLY CHILDHOOD NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Throughout this process, the collaboration and support of the City of Valdez Child Care Committee has been instrumental in its success. The committee consists of the following members:

- » *Teresa Barton - Prince William Sound College, Regional Director of Adult Education*
- » *Mark Detter - City of Valdez, City Manager*
- » *Olivia Foster- Providence Valdez Medical Center, Registered Nurse*
- » *Ana Hinkle - City of Valdez, Communications Director*
- » *Jennifer James - City of Valdez, Civic Center Facility Manager*
- » *Gianna Giusti - Hermon Hutchens Elementary School, School Counselor*
- » *Susan Love - City of Valdez, City Council Member*

Thank you to all members of the City's Child Care Committee, everyone who completed a survey, all key informants and employers interviewed, and everyone who shared a story through the online portal.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Insufficient affordable child care is a national crisis, further exacerbated in recent years by the COVID-19 pandemic. The crisis extends to Alaska, and the coastal town of Valdez is not exempt. In summer 2022, the only full-time, year-round licensed child care provider in the community was forced to permanently close its doors. Families in need of care must rely on unlicensed care; utilize seasonal, part-time preschools; or in some cases, reduce their hours at work or leave the workforce entirely.

In 2022, the City of Valdez contracted with the Stellar Group to conduct a needs assessment to better understand the effects of Valdez's child care crisis on families, businesses, and the community more broadly, as well as exploring contributing factors to this crisis and providing recommendations to move closer to an ideal child care system.

This report consists of two parts. Part 1 details the findings of the child care needs assessment. Part 2 contains child development indicators and program participation information.

## PART 1: CHILD CARE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided this report:

- » *What is the current state of child care in Valdez, including but not limited to demand, quality, and capacity?*
- » *How well is current capacity meeting the needs of Valdez families and children?*
- » *Are families satisfied with their current child care situation?*
- » *What barriers have families faced in accessing their preferred child care?*
- » *What factors have contributed to the current state of child care in Valdez?*
- » *What effects have the state of child care in Valdez had on the broader community, including but not limited to employers?*

### METHODOLOGY

This report utilized a mixed-methods approach. It draws from 126 valid responses from a survey of local parents/guardians of children up to age 12, 28 interviews with key informants and employers, six "stories" shared via an online portal by current and/or former community members, and secondary indicator data (i.e., Census data, etc.). A full methodology is found in Appendix A.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

As of 2021, Valdez was home to an estimated 3,971 people, including 732 children under the age of 13: 301 from birth to age five and 431 from ages six to 12.<sup>i</sup> Proportions of children in these age groups to the total population are very similar in Valdez compared to statewide proportions.<sup>ii</sup> Valdez is also home to the Valdez Native Tribe.

Over the last ten years, the population of Valdez has decreased slightly, from a high of 4,170 in 2012 to 3,971 in 2021, or a 5% decrease.<sup>iii, iv</sup> By comparison, the statewide population has increased by 0.3% in this same time period.<sup>v</sup>

Socio-economic status influences a family's ability to meet basic needs and access their preferred child care, healthcare, and/or social supports. In 2020, individuals in Valdez (6%) were less likely than individuals statewide to live below the federal poverty level (FPL) (10%).<sup>vi, vii</sup> While Valdez's relatively low poverty rate is very encouraging, there are still people living on the margins. An additional 11% of individuals in Valdez live between 100% and 200% FPL.

Additionally, data highlights economic disparities between different types of families. With fishing as a major economic industry in Valdez, there are also many households who have seasonal income and thus fluctuate between higher and lower-income throughout the course of a year, potentially affecting eligibility to apply for public assistance or other aides.<sup>viii</sup> Further, there is a large gap in income between households with wages or salary income and households with self-employment income.<sup>ix</sup> In 2020, the mean income for all households receiving wages or salary income was \$93,316. By comparison the mean income for households receiving self-employment income was \$50,593. Public assistance usage has decreased in recent years in both Valdez and statewide.

## CURRENT CAPACITY AND UNMET DEMAND

The City of Valdez is currently a child care desert. There is limited capacity in the current system and a high level of unmet demand in the community. As of summer 2022, Valdez has no full-time, year-round licensed child care, following the closure of Stepping Stones Learning Center. There are currently three licensed preschools in Valdez: Valdez City Schools operates two preschool programs at Hermon Hutchens Elementary School, one general education and one special education, and there is also a family-run cooperative preschool program. However, due to limited capacity and/or hours, these do not sufficiently meet the needs of all families who need child care. According to the most recent data, an estimated 76 young children are attending one of Valdez's preschools, or just 25% of the 301 children in Valdez under six.<sup>x</sup> Fifty-percent of survey respondents' children attend one of Valdez's licensed preschools or Hermon Hutchens Elementary School.

Immediately prior to its closure, Stepping Stones had a capacity of 30 children from ages zero to 12 and a wait list between four and nine children. Although it was licensed for 60,

staffing issues limited its actual capacity. Additionally, Valdez does not currently have a Head Start or an Early Head Start program - two important early childhood education programs for low-income families.

Sixty percent of survey respondents are looking for any, more, or different child care. Additionally, although many families (40%) currently utilize paid or volunteer unlicensed care, 74% of survey respondents feel it is important for their household to use licensed child care. The following table shows the estimated number of children in various age groups in Valdez<sup>x1</sup> and the estimated unmet demand for child care in those groups. Methodology of calculations is included in Appendix A.

<b>TABLE: ESTIMATED UNMET CHILD CARE DEMAND</b>			
	Estimated # of Children	Estimated Unmet Demand (Low End)	Estimated Unmet Demand (High End)
Infants (0-18 m)	75	40	50
Preschoolers (19 m - 5 y)	226	90	136
School-Aged (6 y - 12 y)	431	190	259

### IMPACTS OF INSUFFICIENT CHILD CARE

Insufficient child care impacts a community at all levels, from the family unit to the city as a whole. Families and employers both described a range of impacts caused by insufficient child care. These impacts are interrelated in nature:

1. Families are Unable to Work
2. Employers are Unable to Retain Sufficient and Reliable Staffing
3. Valdez’s Economy is Affected
4. Families are Considering Leaving Valdez

When families do not have access to affordable, reliable child care, their ability to seek and hold employment is affected. When children’s parents/guardians are unable to work, businesses are affected. A majority of interviewed employers shared that Valdez’s child care crisis has directly impacted the availability of their employees. When capable individuals are unable to fully participate in the workforce and when businesses are unable to recruit and retain sufficient staff, the community’s broader economy is also affected both in terms of smaller workforce and diminished community revenue. Some interviewees shared anecdotal accounts of families leaving or considering leaving Valdez, often directly as a result of the lack of child care or difficulty finding adequate employment. Survey findings corroborate this: four in ten respondents (42%) have considered moving away from Valdez due to a lack of child care.



## STAFFING AND LICENSING REQUIREMENTS

Ultimately, Stepping Stones was forced to close due to a difficulty finding and retaining staff. In child care centers, at least one Child Care Associate (CCA), with requirements similar to those of an administrator, must be present at all times any children are present.<sup>xii</sup>

In addition to the recent closure of Stepping Stones Learning Center, interviews revealed that a perception of difficulty surrounding the process of becoming a licensed provider and operating as such may be deterring individuals from seeking to do so. There are many regulations surrounding child care providers in Alaska; anyone providing care for more than four unrelated children without a child care license is considered by the State to be operating illegally. Insufficient housing may further contribute to a difficulty attracting potential child care providers to relocate to Valdez.

## MOVING TOWARD AN IDEAL SYSTEM

Survey respondents, key informants, and local interviews shared many ideas for what an ideal child care system in Valdez would look like. The majority (74%) of survey respondents felt licensed child care is important. An ideal child care system would consist of adequate licensed care capacity for community demand. Additionally, when asked to identify the top considerations when selecting a child care provider, respondents most commonly cited the following:

- » *Safety*
- » *Reliability*
- » *High-quality care*
- » *Trained and experienced staff*
- » *Affordability*
- » *Flexible hours*

## CONCLUSION

While Valdez is not alone in its child care crisis, it is unique in its specific circumstances. The community's current lack of licensed child care, coupled with the high importance placed on quality licensed care by local families, illuminates a clear direction for the City of Valdez to explore. Several interviewees and survey respondents felt an ideal child care system would involve increased involvement from the City of Valdez; many survey respondents expressed a desire to see the City support partners and local businesses in addressing the issue, rather than creating the solution on its own.

Additionally, most interviewed employers expressed interest in having further conversations with the City of Valdez on how to move closer to this ideal child care system. Interviewees also shared additional visions for collaborative opportunities that varied from child care facilities partnering with local homes for the elderly to child care providers partnering with Valdez High School to develop a career pipeline. The enthusiasm of local employers to

participate in solving the crisis will prove to be valuable in moving closer to the ideal child care system. Continued conversations are the first step to establishing and eventually leveraging community partnerships to lay the groundwork for an even stronger, healthier, and more supportive Valdez.

## PART 2: CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

### CHILD DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS

In addition to the needs assessment, a second part of this report explores child development indicators and participation in community programs and activities. The Alaska Childhood Understanding Behaviors Survey (CUBS) is sent to a random sample of mothers across Alaska three years after giving birth. In 2015-2020, nearly half of CUBS respondents from the Valdez-Cordova Census Area said their children have more than one hour of screen time a day, a figure slightly lower than across Alaska.<sup>xiii</sup> Young children's regular engagement in early learning activities is positively linked to healthy developmental outcomes. CUBS measures several early learning activities, all of which are engaged in four days a week or more by at least 86% of the 2015-2020 respondents from the Valdez-Cordova Census Area. In the 2021-2022 school year, 45% of Valdez children met 11 or more of 13 kindergarten readiness goals at least 80% of the time.<sup>xiv</sup> Although Valdez's readiness is 14% higher than the statewide percentage, it also indicates that 55% of Valdez's children do not meet readiness goals.

### PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

Early learning activities provide young children with opportunities to develop social, emotional, and motor skills. Survey respondents and/or their children attended/participated in a variety of early learning and/or developmental activities in the last year. The most attended activity was Storytime at the Library, attended by 52% of respondents. Other highly attended activities included swimming lessons (49%), Tot Swim (38%), Tot Gym (36%), and Lego My Library (34%).

There are many reasons a family may find early learning activities important yet not attend; just 10% of respondents reported facing no barriers to attending. Lack of awareness (61%) and scheduling conflicts (61%) were the most common reasons among respondents. Only 10% did not attend due to lack of interest. Respondents received information about family events and activities from a variety of sources, most commonly, Facebook (88%). Nearly half (49%) received such information via bulletin boards, and one-third (32%) from the radio.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>i</sup> State of Alaska, Department of Labor and Workforce Development. (2021). *Alaska population by age, sex and borough/census area, 2010, 2020 to 2021*. [Data file]. <https://live.laborstats.alaska.gov/pop/estimates/data/AgeBySexBCA.xls>

<sup>ii</sup> State of Alaska, Department of Labor and Workforce Development. (2021). *Alaska population by age and sex, 2010, 2020 to 2021*. [Data file]. <https://live.laborstats.alaska.gov/pop/estimates/data/AgeBySexAK.xls>

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- <sup>III</sup> State of Alaska, Department of Labor and Workforce Development. (2020). *Alaska population estimates by borough, census area, city and designated place (CDP), 2010-2021*. [Data file]. [https://live.laborstats.alaska.gov/pop/estimates/data/TotalPopulationPlace\\_2010to2020.xls](https://live.laborstats.alaska.gov/pop/estimates/data/TotalPopulationPlace_2010to2020.xls)
- <sup>IV</sup> State of Alaska, Department of Labor and Workforce Development. (2021). *Population by age and sex for Alaska cities and census designated places (CDPs) with a population of 1,000 or more, 2010, 2020 to 2021*. [Data file]. <http://live.laborstats.alaska.gov/pop/estimates/data/AgeBySexPlace.xls>
- <sup>V</sup> State of Alaska, Department of Labor and Workforce Development. (2021). *Annual components of population change for Alaska, 1945 to 2021*. [Data file]. <https://live.laborstats.alaska.gov/pop/estimates/data/ComponentsOfChangeAK.xls>
- <sup>VI</sup> United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables: Table S1701. (2020). *Poverty status in the past 12 months*. <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=1600000US0282200&tid=ACSST5Y2020.S1701>
- <sup>VII</sup> United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables: Table S1701. (2020). *Poverty status in the past 12 months*. <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=s1701%20alaska&tid=ACSST5Y2020.S1701>
- <sup>VIII</sup> United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables: Table S1701. (2020). *Poverty status in the past 12 months*. <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=1600000US0282200&tid=ACSST5Y2020.S1701>
- <sup>IX</sup> United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables: Table S1902. (2020). *Mean income in the past 12 months (in 2020 inflation-adjusted dollars)*. <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=Valdez%20city.%20Alaska%20incom&tid=ACSST5Y2020.S1902>
- <sup>X</sup> State of Alaska, Department of Labor and Workforce Development. (2021). *Alaska population by age, sex and borough/census area, 2010, 2020 to 2021*. [Data file]. <https://live.laborstats.alaska.gov/pop/estimates/data/AgeBySexBCA.xls>
- <sup>XI</sup> State of Alaska, Department of Labor and Workforce Development. (2021). *Alaska population by age, sex and borough/census area, 2010, 2020 to 2021*. [Data file]. <https://live.laborstats.alaska.gov/pop/estimates/data/AgeBySexBCA.xls>
- <sup>XII</sup> Child Care Facilities Licensing, AS. § 7 AAC 57.330 (2006). <https://www.akleg.gov/basis/aac.asp#7.57.330>
- <sup>XIII</sup> Alaska Childhood Understanding Behaviors Survey. (2019-2020). *Alaska CUBS data, 2015-2020; Valdez-Cordova Census Area and statewide*. [Data file]. Received via data request.
- <sup>XIV</sup> State of Alaska, Department of Education and Early Development. (2022). *2021-2022 Alaska Developmental Profile results*. <https://education.alaska.gov/assessment-results/ADP/ADPResults?DistrictYear=2021-2022&DistrictId=48>

# Part 1

## CHILD CARE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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## INTRODUCTION

Insufficient affordable child care is a national crisis, further exacerbated in recent years by the COVID-19 pandemic. The crisis extends to Alaska: A report published in 2021 found that 77% of parents in Alaska have missed work in the last three months due to child care issues, leading to an estimated \$165 million loss for Alaska's economy.<sup>1</sup>

The Alaskan coastal town of Valdez is not exempt. In summer of 2022, the only full-time, year-round, licensed child care provider in the community permanently closed its doors. Families in need of child care rely on unlicensed care; utilize seasonal, part-time preschools; or in some cases, reduce their hours at work or leave the workforce entirely.

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

In 2022, the City of Valdez contracted with the Stellar Group to conduct this needs assessment to better understand the effects of Valdez's child care crisis on families, businesses, and the community more broadly, as well as explore contributing factors to this crisis and provide recommendations to move closer to an ideal child care system.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided this report:

- » *What is the current state of child care in Valdez, including but not limited to demand, quality, and capacity?*
- » *How well is current capacity meeting the needs of Valdez families and children?*
- » *Are families satisfied with their current child care situation?*
- » *What barriers have families faced in accessing their preferred child care?*
- » *What factors have contributed to the current state of child care in Valdez?*
- » *What effects have the state of child care in Valdez had on the broader community, including but not limited to employers?*

## METHODOLOGY

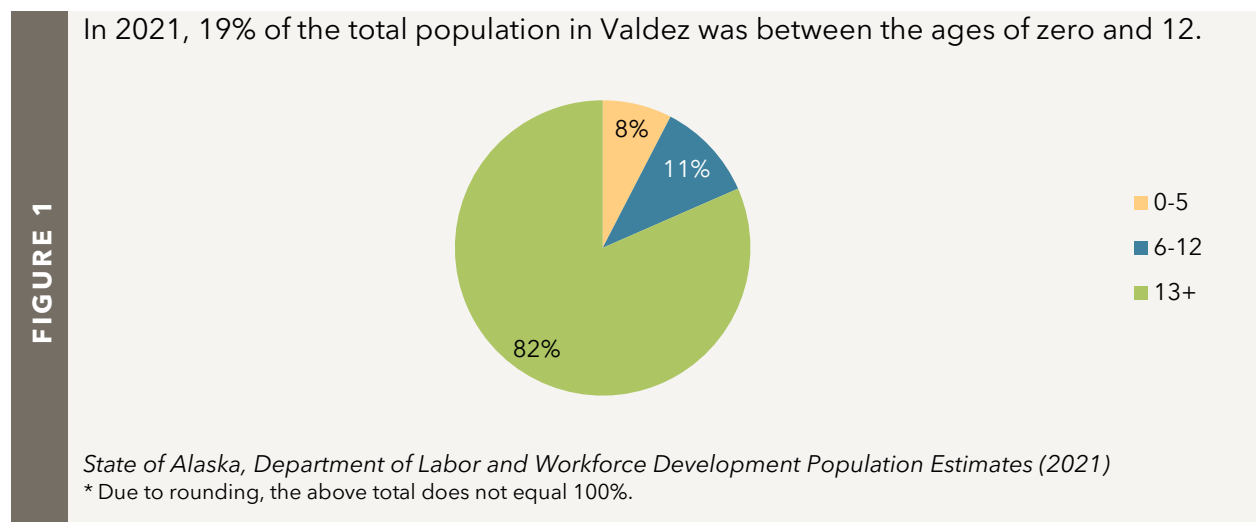
This report utilized a mixed-methods approach. It draws from 126 valid responses from a survey of local parents/guardians of children up to age 12, 28 interviews with key informants and employers, six "stories" shared via an online portal by current and/or former community members, and secondary indicator data (i.e., Census data, etc.). A full methodology is found in Appendix A.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

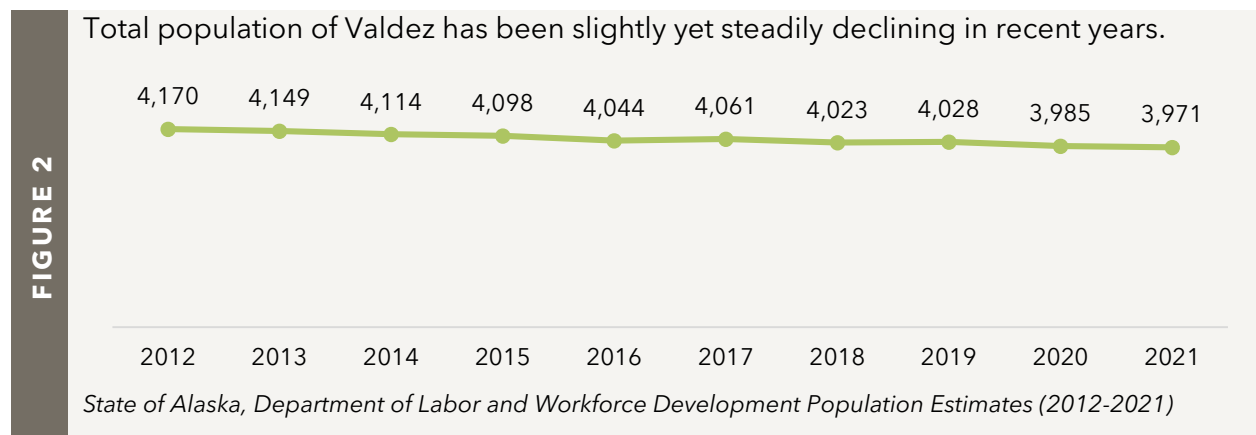
Valdez is a small, tightly knit coastal community located in the Gulf Coast region of Alaska along the Prince William Sound. Reachable by highway, plane, and boat, its largest industries are the trade, transportation, and utilities sector and local government.<sup>2</sup>

### POPULATION

As of 2021, Valdez was home to an estimated 3,971 people, including 732 children under the age of 13: 301 from birth to age five and 431 from ages six to 12.<sup>3</sup> Proportions of children in these age groups to the total population are very similar in Valdez compared to statewide proportions.<sup>4</sup> Valdez is also home to the Valdez Native Tribe.

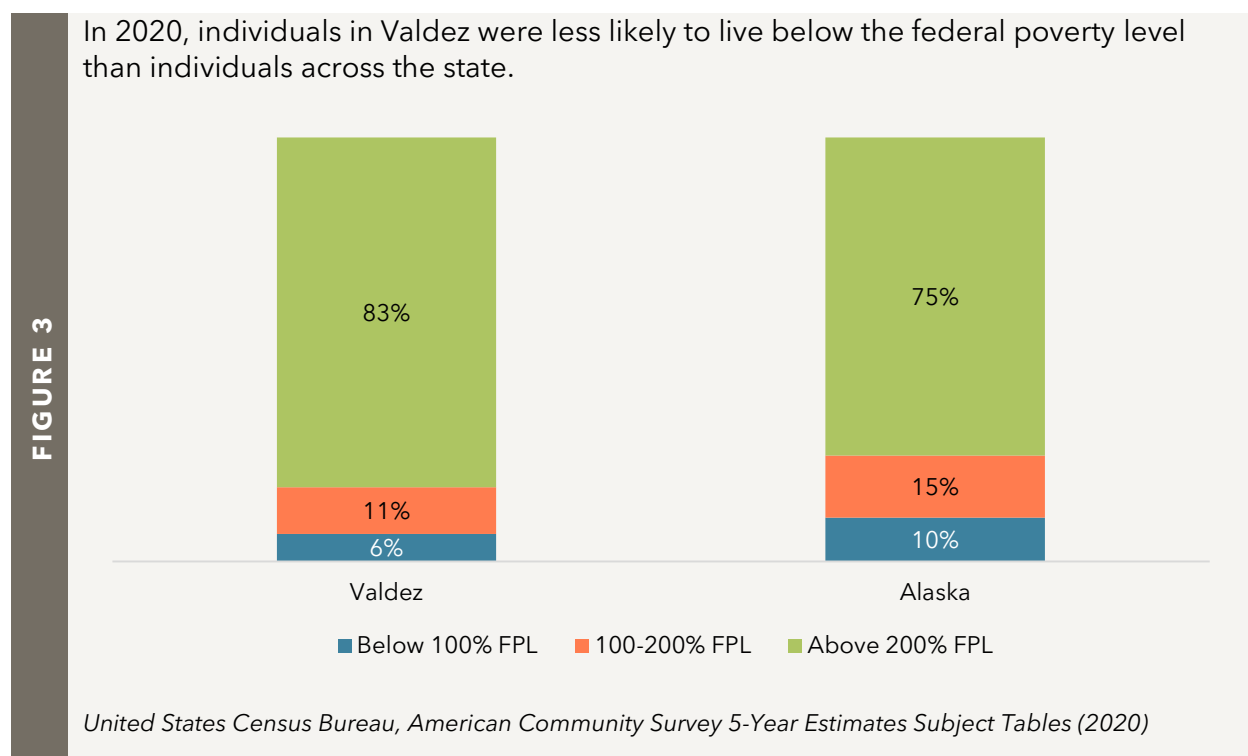


Over the last ten years, the population of Valdez has decreased slightly, from a high of 4,170 in 2012 to 3,971 in 2021, or a 5% decrease.<sup>5,6</sup> By comparison, the statewide population has increased by 0.3% in this same time period.<sup>7</sup>



## SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

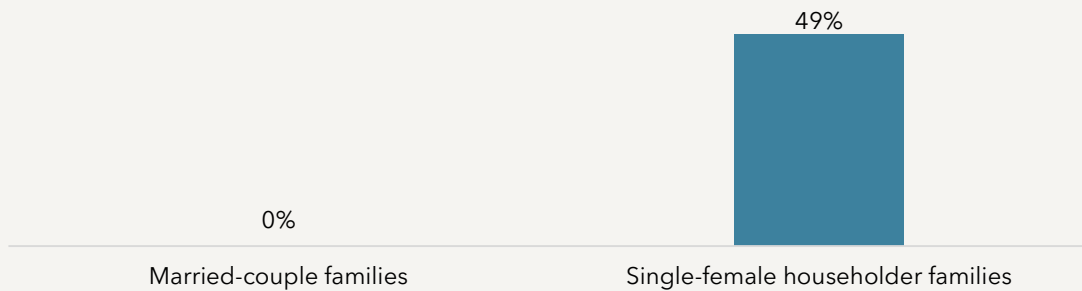
Socio-economic status influences a family's ability to meet basic needs and access their preferred child care, healthcare, and/or social supports. In 2020, individuals in Valdez (6%) were less likely than individuals statewide to live below the federal poverty level (FPL) (10%).<sup>8</sup> While Valdez's relatively low poverty rate is very encouraging, there are still people living on the margins. An additional 11% of individuals in Valdez live between 100% and 200% FPL. Further, it is important to note that U.S. Census and American Community Survey estimates for poverty rates (utilized here) in Alaska do not account for the adjusted FPL in Alaska when completing national rankings or calculating poverty levels in Alaska. Therefore, U.S. Census poverty estimates for Alaska are underestimated. In Alaska, the adjusted poverty guideline equals 125% FPL.<sup>10</sup>



Additionally, data highlights economic disparities between different types of families. Families are defined by the U.S. Census as two related individuals living in the same household. It is estimated that no Valdez married-couple families with children under 18 live below the federal poverty level. By comparison, an estimated 49% of Valdez single-female householder families with children under 18 live below the federal poverty line.<sup>11</sup> (Due to a large margin of error, this figure should be interpreted with caution.)

**FIGURE 4**

Single-female householder families with children under 18 in Valdez are much more likely to live below the federal poverty line than married-couple families.



*United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables (2020)*  
 \*Large margin of error; interpret with caution.

With fishing as a major economic industry in Valdez, many households have seasonal income and thus fluctuate between higher and lower income throughout the year, potentially affecting eligibility to apply for public assistance or other supports (discussed below).<sup>12</sup> Further, there is a large gap in income between households with wages or salary income and households with self-employment income.<sup>13</sup> In 2020, the mean income for all households receiving wages or salary income was \$93,316. By comparison, the mean income for households receiving self-employment income was \$50,593.

**PUBLIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAM USAGE**

Public assistance programs play a critical role in helping many lower-income families address their needs and minimize stress caused by challenges. The following table summarizes enrollment in multiple forms of public assistance available in Valdez from 2017 to 2021 with a focus on children up to age 12. This includes the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Alaska Temporary Assistance Program (ATAP), and the State’s Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP). Enrollment is reported below as total recipients ages 12 and under. In recent years, enrollment in each of these programs has been declining.

**TABLE 1: VALDEZ PUBLIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAM TOTAL ENROLLMENT**

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	% Change 2017-2021
SNAP (0-12)	313	314	299	306	192	-39%
ATAP (0-12)	108	99	109	86	50	-54%
CCAP (0-12)	35	27	28	22	23 *	-34%

*Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Public Assistance (2017-2021)*

\* 2021 AK CCAP enrollment number does not include June-August 2021, and thus may be lower than the actual total.



## SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SNAP)

SNAP is a federally funded nutrition assistance program for income-eligible families. For a household of three to be eligible, monthly income must not exceed \$3,119.<sup>14</sup> The number of children ages 12 and under in Valdez receiving SNAP benefits has decreased in recent years, from 313 in 2017 to 192 in 2021, a 39% decrease.<sup>15</sup> By comparison, statewide SNAP enrollment has decreased by 24% in the same time span for the same group.

## ALASKA TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (ATAP)

Alaska Temporary Assistance Program (ATAP) is an income-eligible program intended to assist families in meeting basic and immediate needs to promote self-sufficiency and positive familial outcomes. It is federally funded by the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant. For a household of three with both parents eligible, monthly income must not exceed \$3,365.<sup>16</sup> The number of Valdez children ages 12 and under receiving state ATAP benefits has gone from 108 in 2017 to 50 in 2021, a 54% decrease, identical to statewide trends.

## STATE OF ALASKA CHILD CARE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (STATE CCAP)

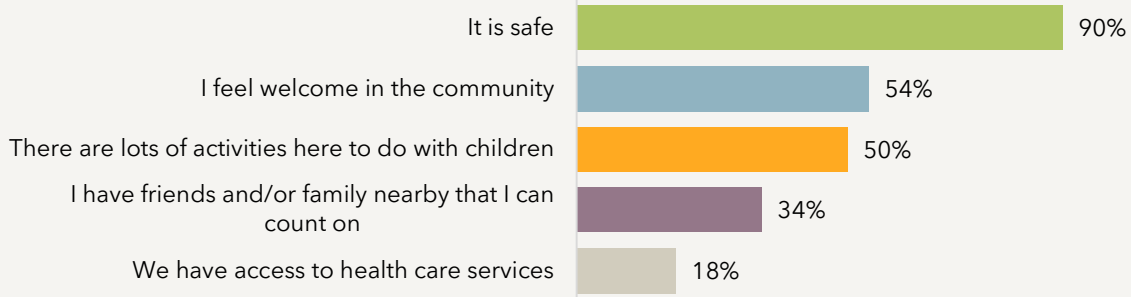
State of Alaska CCAP provides income-eligible families (with a parent who is working or training for employment) with child care tuition assistance. For a household of three to be eligible, monthly income must not exceed \$4,524.<sup>17</sup> Enrollment in Valdez in recent years has remained relatively low. Low enrollment does not necessarily mean a lack of need; low enrollment may also be the result of limited or no available slots with licensed providers. In 2017, 35 0-12-year-olds in Valdez were receiving state CCAP assistance, compared to 23 in 2021. This is a decrease of 34%, less than the statewide decrease of 51% across this same period.

## **BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF RAISING CHILDREN IN VALDEZ**

Survey respondents and individuals interviewed for this assessment shared many reasons Valdez is a great place to live and raise children. Ninety percent of respondents reported its safety as among the best things about living in Valdez. The remaining top five benefits included a sense of belonging in the community (54%), activities for children (50%), nearby friends and family (34%), and access to health care services (18%).

FIGURE 5

The top benefit of raising children in Valdez is that it is safe.



n=126

Interviewees shared similar positive thoughts. Both key informants and employers described Valdez as tightly knit and highly supportive.

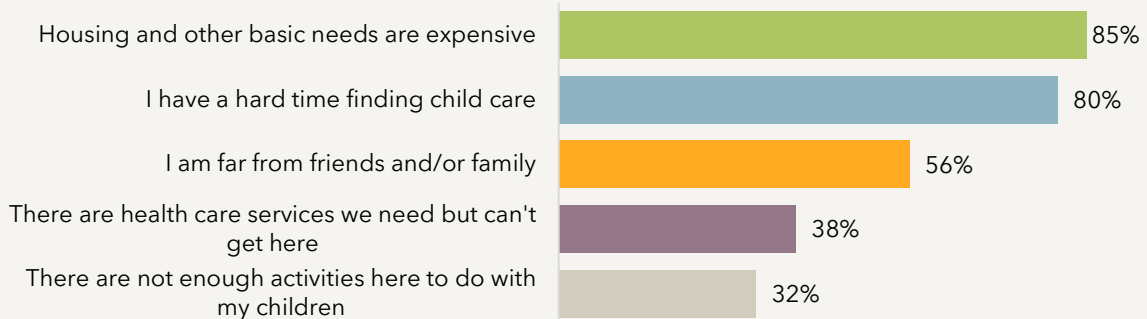
**VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY**

*Valdez has provided a very safe and great environment to raise both of our boys. The Coast Guard moved us here when our oldest was in the third grade. The schools have provided many opportunities that are very unique to Alaska in general. Some of these opportunities we would never have gotten to experience anywhere else.*

Despite all of its positives, 80% of respondents noted difficulty finding child care as a challenge of raising children in Valdez. (Other common challenges are illustrated in the below graph.) The remainder of this report explores this reality and opportunities for improving child care access.

FIGURE 6

Cost of living and difficulty finding childcare are the most common challenges to raising children in Valdez.



n=126

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## CURRENT CAPACITY AND UNMET DEMAND

The City of Valdez is currently a child care desert. There is limited capacity in the current system and a high level of unmet demand in the community. These are explored below:

1. Current Capacity
2. Estimated Unmet Demand

### CURRENT CAPACITY

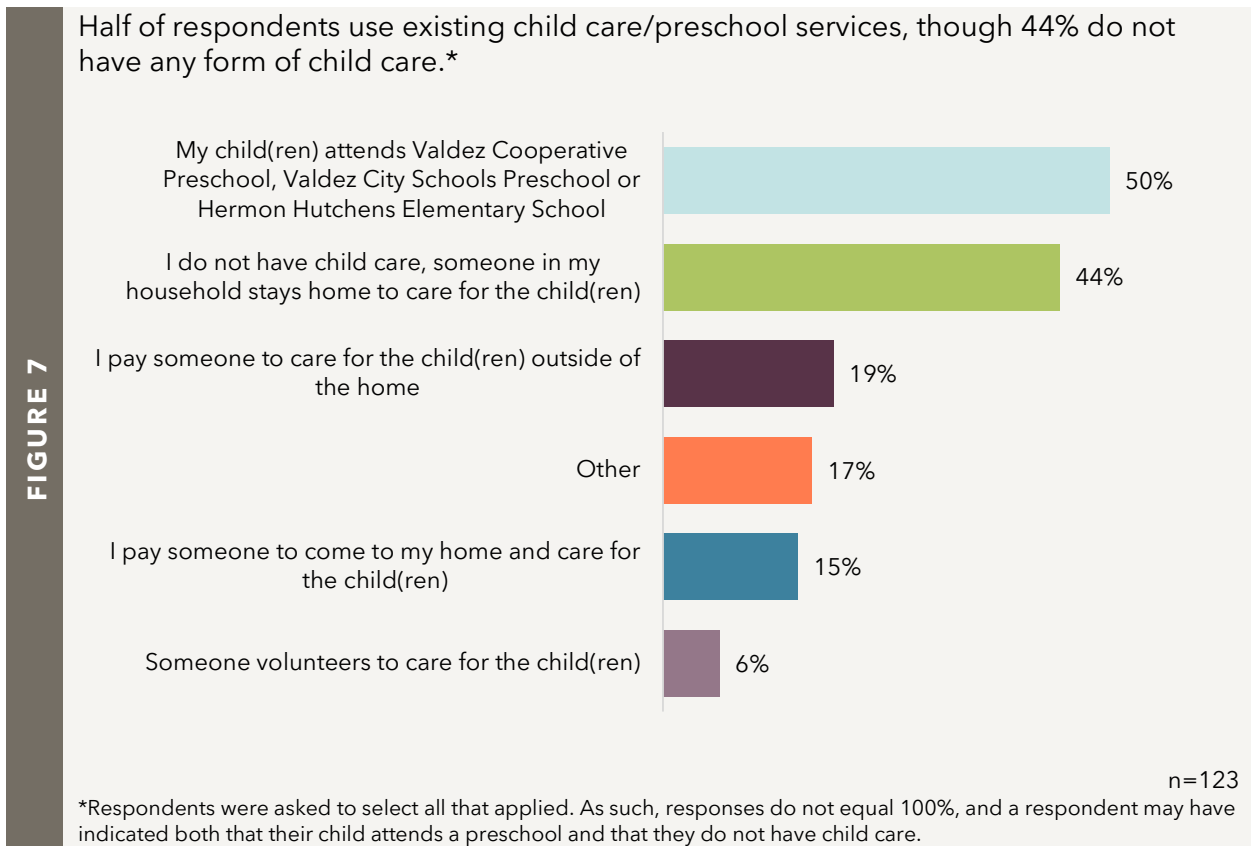
As of summer 2022, Valdez has no full-time, year-round licensed child care. There are currently three licensed preschools in Valdez: Valdez City Schools operates two preschool programs at Hermon Hutchens Elementary School, one general education and one special education, and there is also a family-run cooperative preschool program. However, due to limited capacity and/or hours, these do not sufficiently meet the needs of all families who need child care. According to the most recent data, an estimated 76 young children are attending one of Valdez's preschools, or just 25% of the 301 children in Valdez under six.<sup>18</sup> Fifty percent of survey respondents' children attend one of Valdez's licensed preschools or Hermon Hutchens Elementary School.

Immediately prior to its closure in summer 2022, Stepping Stones Learning Center had a capacity of 30 children from ages zero to 12 and a waitlist of between four and nine children. Although it was licensed for 60, staffing issues limited its actual capacity. Additionally, Valdez does not currently have a Head Start or an Early Head Start program – two important early childhood education programs for low-income families.

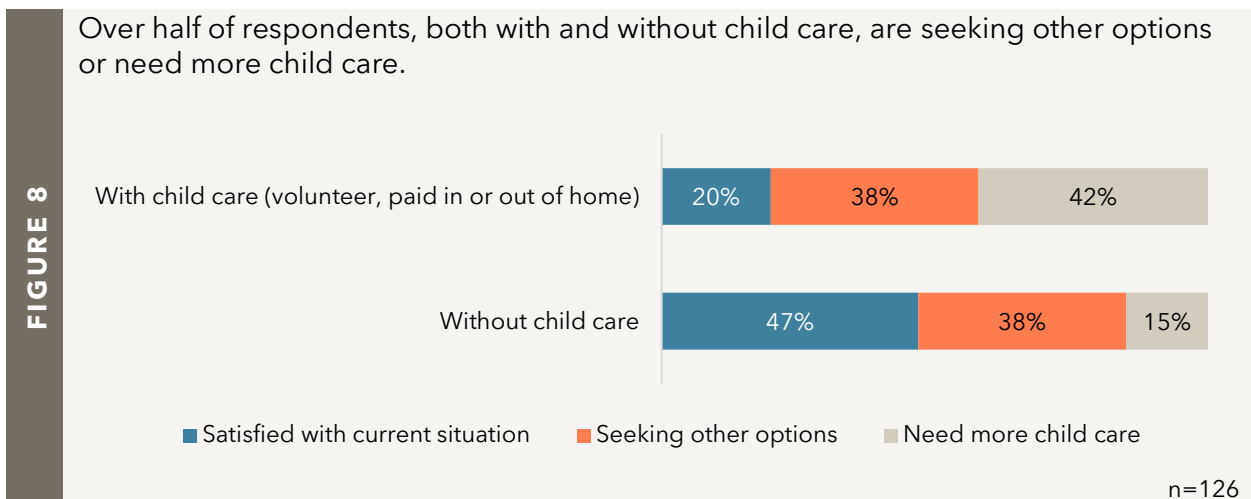
**TABLE 2: CAPACITY OF VALDEZ PRESCHOOLS**

	Capacity	Ages Served	Hours
Valdez Preschool (Cooperative)	30 (total)	2 - 5	Part-time; during school year only
Hutchens General Education Preschool	15 AM / 15 PM	3 - 5	Part-time; during school year only
Hutchens Special Education Preschool	16 (total)	3-5	Part-time; during school year only

In lieu of sufficient or any licensed child care, sometimes due to personal preference, families report that they often rely on unlicensed child care, such as care provided by friends and family or other community members. Forty-four percent of survey respondents do not have child care, and they or someone in their household stays home to care for their child(ren). Choosing to have one partner stay home may be due to personal preference or necessity. Open-ended responses about child care options ranged from bringing children to work and not requiring care due to the age of their children.



Among respondents both with and without child care, only 40% are satisfied with their current situations (15% have childcare and do not need additional child care; 25% do not have child care but are not seeking it). Among respondents who currently have child care (whether volunteer or paid, in or out of their home), just 20% are satisfied with their current situation. Among those who did not have child care, just under half (47%) are satisfied with their current situation.



The fact that most respondents with child care are dissatisfied suggests that these families are doing what they can to fill a need, but it is insufficient. This dissatisfaction is largely due to the lack of availability and the quality of care. Sixty-nine percent of respondents cited lack of child care as the biggest barrier to using their preferred method of child care. Additionally, 53% called out the lack of licensed care as such, indicating a desire for more licensed alternatives to informal care.

### ESTIMATED UNMET DEMAND

Sixty percent of survey respondents are looking for any, more, or different child care. Additionally, although many families (40%) currently utilize paid or volunteer unlicensed care, 74% of survey respondents feel it is important for their household to use licensed child care. Further 42% of respondents have considered leaving Valdez due to lack of child care, and 62% have had employment affected by lack of child care. These are discussed in more detail starting on page 11.

The following table shows the estimated number of children in various age groups in Valdez<sup>19</sup> and the estimated unmet demand for child care in those groups. The methodology of calculations is included in Appendix A.

TABLE 3: ESTIMATED UNMET CHILD CARE DEMAND			
	Estimated # of Children	Estimated Unmet Demand (Low End)	Estimated Unmet Demand (High End)
Infants (0-18 m)	75	40	50
Preschoolers (19 m - 5 y)	226	90	136
School-Aged (6 y - 12 y)	431	190	259

#### INFANTS

There is an estimated unmet child care demand of 40 to 50 infants (birth to 18 months) in Valdez. Valdez currently has no licensed infant care.

#### PRESCHOOLERS

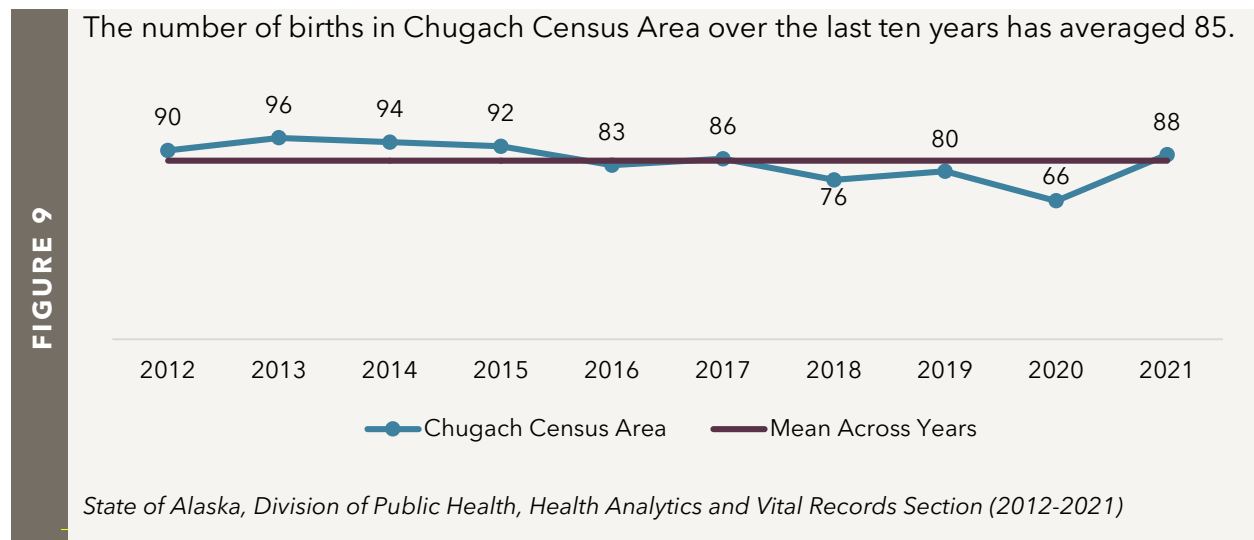
There is an estimated unmet child care demand of 90 to 136 preschool-age children (19 months to 5 years) in Valdez. While Valdez’s preschools currently serve an estimated 76 children, all preschools in Valdez are both part-time and seasonal. This indicates the potential for a higher need during the summer months.

## SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

There is an estimated unmet out-of-school-time-care demand of 190 to 259 school-aged children (6 to 12-year-olds). (Kindergarten in Valdez is full-day.) Out-of-school-time care typically involves after-school programs or summer programs, which can be provided by licensed child care providers or in community settings. As children grow older, their need for any form of care typically decreases over time. However, this age group is broad, and it is important to consider care needs for school-aged children to fully understand the unmet demand in Valdez.

## STABILITY OF ESTIMATED UNMET DEMAND

Analysis of trends in the number of births allows for predictions of future child care demand. Over the last ten years, the annual number of births in the Chugach Census Area has remained relatively near the (mean) average of 85.<sup>20</sup> Although the Chugach Census Area also includes Cordova and Whittier, this trend indicates that future demand for child care in the area should be expected to remain relatively stable.



## IMPACTS OF INSUFFICIENT CHILD CARE

Insufficient child care impacts a community at all levels, from the family unit to the city as a whole. Families and employers both described a range of impacts caused by insufficient child care. These impacts and their interrelated nature are explored below, in the following subsections:

1. Families are Unable to Work
2. Employers are Unable to Retain Sufficient and Reliable Staffing
3. Valdez's Economy is Affected
4. Families are Considering Leaving Valdez

### FAMILIES ARE UNABLE TO WORK

When families do not have access to affordable, reliable child care, their ability to seek and hold employment is affected. Although some parents/guardians prefer to not seek employment, survey responses reflect that many do: Nearly two out of every three respondents (62%) reported that a lack of child care has been a barrier to someone in their household getting or keeping a job. While for many this is due to availability, several respondents also noted that the high cost of care can cancel out their income from a job. *"It's hard to find a job when you just pay for it all to go to childcare."* Interviewees also shared this sentiment.

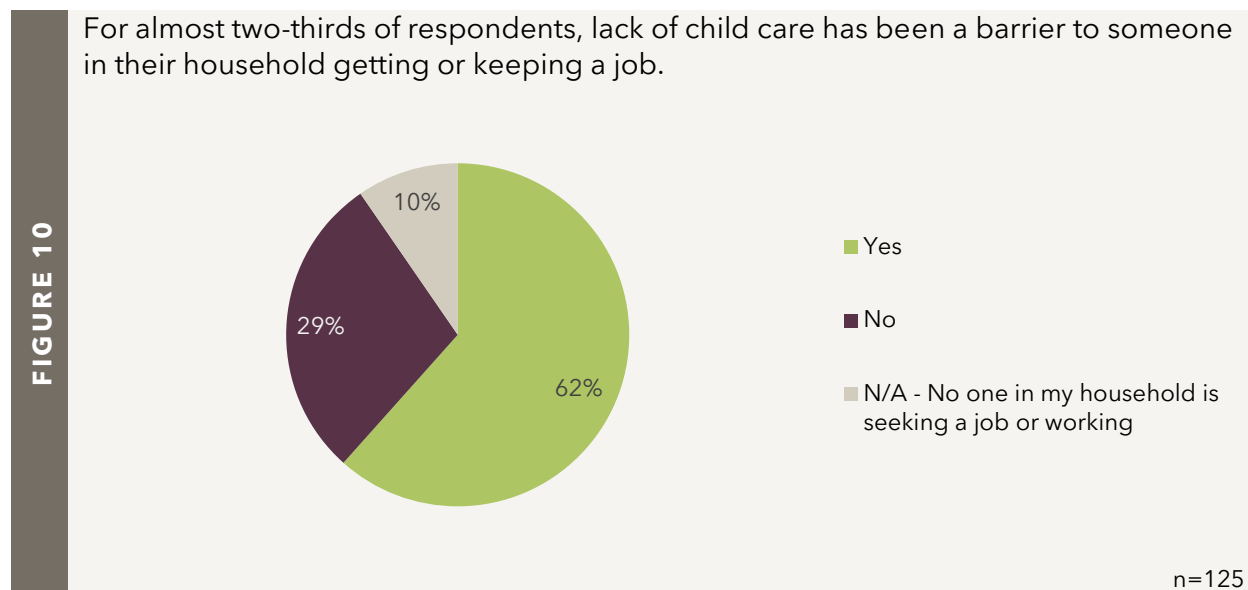


FIGURE 10

**VOICES  
FROM THE  
COMMUNITY**

*We moved to Valdez with six children in September of 2001. We were unable to afford daycare, so my wife went through the process of getting her license, and she did daycare from our home for a couple years. We were finally able to get jobs where one of us was at home while the other was at work.*

*Valdez has always struggled with daycare. Parents had to juggle a challenging work schedule in order to have someone drop off their child or children at daycare and pick them up before the daycare closes. This can be a challenge for parents who work 12-hour shifts.*

*The cost for daycare often took a large portion of the income from one or both parents. A home daycare was often more affordable than the larger daycare in town [Puffin Learning Center], and the quality was often better (attention to their children was). Not having a daycare in Valdez has forced some parents to stay out of the workforce until this issue is resolved. Some professionals (clinicians, [certified nurse aides], nurses, caregivers) have had to turn down offers at the hospital because we don't have a daycare option here in Valdez.*

*This has created a shortage of workers, which has contributed to the exhaustion and burnout of those who are able to work but need to cover additional positions because of the shortages. It's a "domino effect" across the community of Valdez.*

**EMPLOYERS ARE UNABLE TO RETAIN SUFFICIENT AND RELIABLE STAFFING**

When parents/guardians are unable to work, businesses are affected. A majority of interviewed employers shared that Valdez's child care crisis has directly impacted the availability of their employees. When a child care facility experienced an intermittent closure, employed parents/guardians were forced to miss work, arrive late, or leave early. Employers reported accommodating employees with young children in various ways, most commonly by allowing flexible hours whenever possible. In some instances, employees were left with no choice but to reduce their hours from full-time to part-time or even leave their position entirely. Additionally, many employers felt that the lack of child care was also affecting their ability to recruit new employees.

*"We've lost some really talented people because they wanted to have a family, and there's no daycare. And... they couldn't afford to have a job and then pay out more in daycare than what they were making. I've lost really, really good employees – high-quality people that just wanted to raise a family." – Local employer*



In open comments, survey respondents shared how the lack of child care has impacted employment in their families:

- » *“My partner was prematurely laid off from his seasonal job because he needed to leave work several times due to his son's child care needs.”*
- » *“I am only available to work 2.5 days due to child care.”*
- » *“My husband left his job at Alyeska, and I went from full-time to part-time. I may need to leave my position if I cannot find child care assistance during the summer months while my husband is gone fishing.”*
- » *“I have had to stay home many times due to no child care, and it puts my employment at risk each time.”*

### VALDEZ'S ECONOMY IS AFFECTED

When capable individuals are unable to fully participate in the workforce and when businesses are unable to recruit and retain sufficient staff, the community's broader economy is also affected both in terms of a smaller workforce and diminished community revenue. A community member shared the following story, highlighting these ripple effects of insufficient child care:

#### VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY

*I had two zero to 12-year-olds from 1995 to 2009 here in Valdez, and from what I hear about childcare issues today, they are very similar to the historic challenges I had here in Valdez. This is not just a current problem.*

*I had friends with young children that moved out of town when my children were young due to childcare issues. Without reliable daycare for variable schedules (12-hour shift workers) or family close by, they chose to move to be closer to family. That impacts the current population.*

*While my kids were one to seven years old, my husband took a job that worked evenings and weekends, and I worked [Monday to Friday]. This was a difficult schedule as a family but really the best choice for us to be able to care for the kids.*

*There was no part-time child care available so we did a lot of juggling, as our shifts overlapped two hours four days a week. This included bringing my kids to my job, him bringing the kids to his job (until his supervisor stated he was not allowed to do that anymore), or finding someone who was willing to watch them for a few hours. It was an incredibly stressful time. This stress impacted our behavior every day with both our kids and at work.*

*We couldn't afford to live in Valdez on one income. Once both boys were in school, my husband took a job as a paraprofessional at the*

*school in order to be on their schedule. This was a 50% cut in pay for him, but we chose to do that to ensure our children had care while school was out in the afternoon, for vacation breaks, summers, and all the other days the school is closed that leave parents with no child care.*

*Not everyone would be willing or able to sacrifice that income. We made this work due to our love of this community and some tough choices. Our boys went through the K-12 school system here, and both graduated from University of Alaska Fairbanks, keeping them in Alaska.*

*The lack of child care is preventing businesses from having the employees they need, as well as reducing the population of the town as families choose to move. This has been an issue for over 30 years. Think of the opportunities that have been lost due to this problem.*

### FAMILIES ARE CONSIDERING LEAVING VALDEZ

Some interviewees shared anecdotal accounts of families leaving or considering leaving Valdez, often directly as a result of the lack of child care or difficulty finding adequate employment. Survey findings corroborate this: four in ten respondents (42%) have considered moving away from Valdez due to a lack of child care.

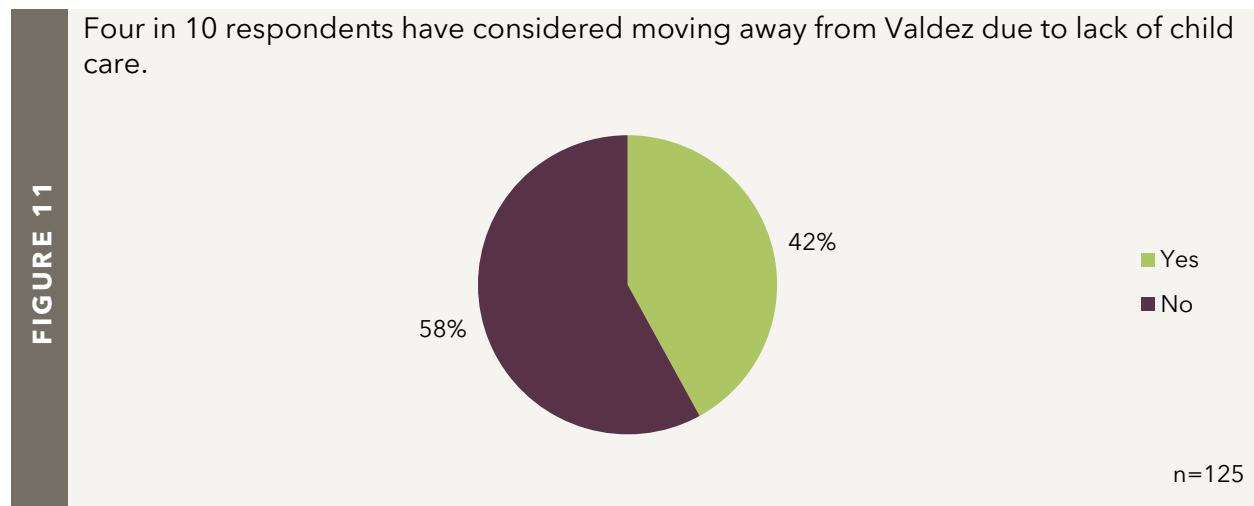


FIGURE 11

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## STAFFING AND LICENSING REQUIREMENTS

In the summer of 2022, the only full-time, year-round, licensed child care provider in Valdez, Stepping Stones Learning Center (Stepping Stones), ceased operations. Ultimately, Stepping Stones was forced to close due to difficulty finding and retaining staff. As explored in the introduction, this challenge is not unique to Valdez.

### VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY

*As part of the board of Stepping Stones Learning Center, we struggled greatly with finding staff that would stay, and especially staff that was qualified. After recently losing our executive director to a move out of state, we struggled trying to find someone with the qualifications to obtain a CCA [Child Care Associate] and CDA to fill her position.*

*We ultimately were unable to find someone with that qualification and the State said we would not be allowed to open without it (understandably). Although we did find two new faces to be teachers for the center, since neither had the qualifications, and we couldn't find someone, we had to let those two potential candidates know that we were closing down permanently.*

*We had found a new place we wanted to rent out that would be cheaper on rent each month and included all utilities in the rent. It even had a giant shop space we could have turned into a gym for the kids.*

*The goal of the new facility was to allow us more money to put towards our employees (higher base pay, potential benefits). However, since we were unable to obtain someone with the credentials the State requires, we turned down the potential new location.*

*It was a hard decision for the board, but ultimately, the State gave us a timeframe, and we did not have any prospects for qualified caregivers whom were able to obtain that CCA and CDA before the deadline.*

Insufficient housing may contribute to difficulty in attracting potential child care providers to relocate to Valdez. Many interviewed employers noted a lack of sufficient available housing for individuals seeking to move to Valdez, corroborated by a recent housing market assessment and gap analysis.<sup>21</sup> Some employers felt insufficient housing options directly contributed to difficulty recruiting employees or attracting individuals to town.

In addition to the recent closure of Stepping Stones, interviews revealed that a perception of difficulty surrounding the process of becoming a licensed provider and operating as such may be deterring individuals from seeking to do so. thread, Alaska's Child Care Resource and Referral Network, provides CDA training (including financial assistance), startup grants,

and other technical assistance to those wishing to become licensed.<sup>22</sup> Still, this perception of difficulty may be a factor in the dearth of licensed child care providers in Valdez.

“People who are interested in [providing child care] – to be licensed, obviously, isn’t an easy thing to do... For most of those folks, regardless of licensing requirements, it’s just not very realistic to have more than two or three kids that you’re trying to provide [care for] within your home.” – Key informant

Child care providers are regulated in Alaska to provide for the health and safety of children; anyone providing care for more than four unrelated children without a child care license is considered by the State to be operating illegally.<sup>23</sup> (Exceptions do exist.) To become licensed, including for care provided in one’s home, a few state requirements must be met. These include submitting an application, background checks for staff, and a fire and safety inspection.

All licensed providers are also required to have an acting administrator who must be at least 21 years of age. In child care centers, administrators must have at least 12 semesters hours of college credit in a relevant area or a CDA credential/Montessori certification, and be approved by the State.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, per state regulations, at least one Child Care Associate (CCA) per 30 children, with requirements similar to those of an administrator, must be present at a child care center at all times.<sup>25</sup>

### **CHILD CARE HOME (UP TO EIGHT CHILDREN)**

In addition to staff requirements, if care is to be provided out of one’s home, anyone living in the house over the age of 16 must also complete a background check.<sup>26</sup> Child care homes only require one caregiver (who may also act as administrator), and may provide care for up to eight children, including their own. No more than three children may be under 30 months old, and no more than two may be non-ambulatory.<sup>27</sup>

### **CHILD CARE GROUP HOME (NINE TO 12 CHILDREN)**

Child care group homes require at least two caregivers (one who may also act as administrator), and may provide care for up to 12 children, including their own. In certain instances, only one caregiver is required, e.g., if all children are school aged. No more than five children may be under 30 months old, and no more than four may be non-ambulatory.<sup>28</sup> A child care group home must have at least 35 square feet of usable indoor space (not including hallways, bathrooms, etc.) for each child and access to outdoor space for children.<sup>29</sup>

### **CHILD CARE CENTER (13 OR MORE CHILDREN)**

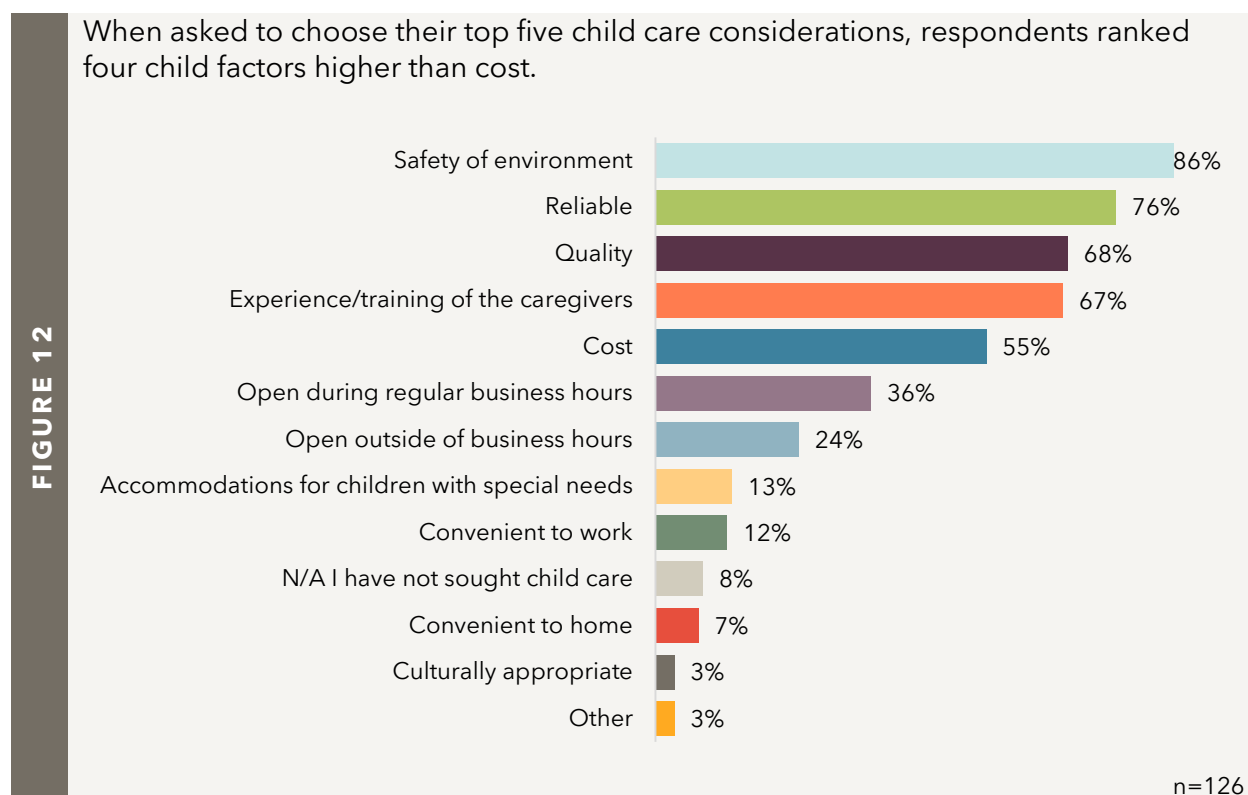
Child care centers are required to adhere to stricter staff-to-child ratios. Infants (birth through 18 months) require a staff-to-child ratio of 1:5, toddlers of 1:6, preschoolers of 1:10,

kindergartners of 1:14, and school-age children (7 to 12-year-olds) of 1:18.<sup>30</sup> A child care center must have at least 35 square feet of usable indoor space (not including hallways, bathrooms, etc.) for each child and access to outdoor space for children.<sup>31</sup>

## MOVING TOWARD AN IDEAL SYSTEM

This section explores proposed visions for an ideal child care system in Valdez, as shared by community members, including survey respondents, key informants, and employers.

When asked to identify the top five considerations when selecting a child care provider, respondents most commonly cited safety, reliability, quality, experience/training of caregivers, and cost. Following these, schedule considerations were also commonly cited both for regular business hours and outside of regular business hours.

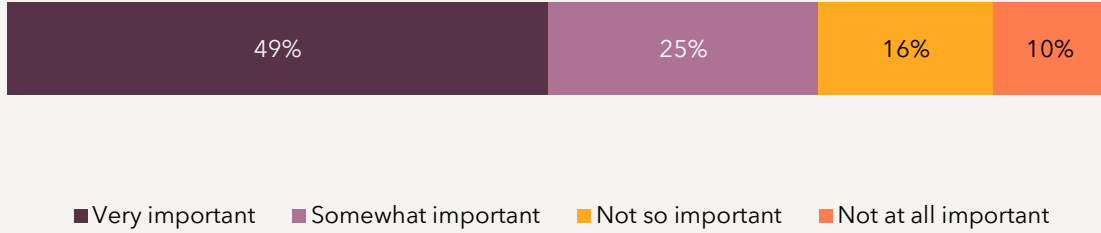


### LICENSED CHILD CARE

The majority (74%) of survey respondents felt licensed child care is important. As discussed above, Valdez's preschools currently only serve an estimated 76 children, and no options offer either full-time or year-round care. As opposed to unlicensed care, licensed care must meet certain State regulations for the location and size of a facility, safety measures, staff-to-child ratios, and qualifications of staff, all of which are factors for consideration expressed by respondents. The state's child care assistance program and other financial assistance programs for child care can typically only be used with licensed care. An ideal child care system would consist of adequate licensed care capacity for community demand.

FIGURE 13

74% of respondents believe that licensed child care is important.



n=126

"The babysitter is charging \$15 an hour, which is reasonable for her, but adds up quickly. If there was a licensed daycare, we would get a stipend from the Coast Guard to help." - Survey respondent

### SAFE CHILD CARE

Eighty-six percent of survey respondents cited the safety of a child care environment as among the most important factors. Respondents and interviewees expressed concerns over the safety of the building previously available care was located in, some describing it as being "in disrepair." An ideal child care system would anticipate and address infrastructure and other safety concerns in its facilities.

"[My dream child care situation is] a safe, clean place to take care of my child while I'm at work [staffed by] responsible, kind, and qualified caregivers." - Survey respondent

### RELIABLE CHILD CARE

Prior to its permanent closure, Stepping Stones was forced to intermittently close for varying periods of time. Reasons for this were multiple, including unanticipated building maintenance and staffing issues. In recent years, safety protocols related to COVID-19 exacerbated the frequency of closures. Due to the nature of COVID-19, such closures were often last minute. Children could not attend Stepping Stones during these closures, affecting children's parents'/guardians' work and other schedules, and in some cases their ability to retain employment.

Such closures were likely a consideration of the three-quarters of survey respondents (76%) who cited reliability as among the most important factors when seeking child care. Several survey respondents also noted that their informal child care arrangements are subject to their provider having to take off a day due to sickness or schedule conflicts. Although safety-related intermittent closures are not entirely avoidable, an ideal child care system would maintain sufficient staff to minimize staffing-related closures. Additionally, it would have sufficient infrastructure to anticipate closures when possible and communicate them immediately with children’s parents/guardians.

“[My dream child care situation is] to have a safe, clean, consistent/reliable child care [provider] for my boys that doesn’t take up my whole paycheck.” – Survey respondent

### HIGH-QUALITY CHILD CARE

Some respondents shared concerns over the quality of care available at Stepping Stones, related to programming, staff, and/or communication between the facility and parents/guardians. This sentiment was echoed by some interviewees. It is important to note that Stepping Stones was enrolled in Learn and Grow, the child care quality recognition and improvement system used in Alaska, and sufficient staff met Alaska’s regulations for certification (discussed in the following subsection). Whether or not concerns over quality were grounded in fact or anecdote, they affected the reputation of Stepping Stones.

**VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY**

*My child care experience has not been good. The providers are not trained to handle situations such as biting, pushing, and other aggressive behavior. Communication with parents [was] poor. Very little interaction between providers and child.*

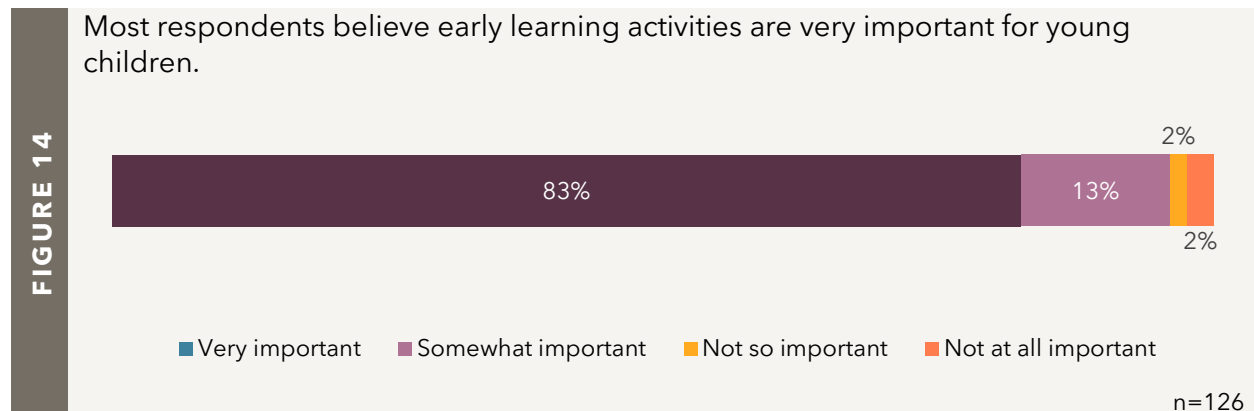
*Several times I would drop my grandson off and was told they could not have him due to staffing issues. No prior notice to make other arrangements. This happened several times.*

*I feel the daycare just hired a live body - no training or experience. Children are just put in a room with a bunch of toys with very little supervision. Staff should be trained, have experience, and care about our children, not just collect a paycheck!*

Such prior experiences were likely a contributing factor to two-thirds (68%) of survey respondents citing quality as among the most important factors when seeking child care. In open comments, many spoke of quality in terms of age-appropriate enrichment activities and having outdoor time.



Additionally, the vast majority (83%) of respondents to the child care survey believe early learning activities are very important for young children; just 4% believe they are not important. While early learning activities are not necessarily synonymous with child care, the importance placed on them by the community may be a further indication of a related desire for high-quality child care.



An ideal child care system would consist of providers that actively participate in Learn and Grow and have sufficient resources to purchase and maintain high-quality learning materials.

“It would be so nice to have a high-quality daycare with learning programs, a reasonable outdoor playground, [and] responsible and friendly staff.” – Survey respondent

### TRAINED AND EXPERIENCED CHILD CARE STAFF

Two-thirds (67%) of survey respondents also cited trained/experienced staff as among the most important factors when seeking child care. Although at least one employee of a child care center must hold a CDA (discussed above), additional State-set staff qualifications are minimal.<sup>32</sup> Professional development programs, such as the Alaska System for Early Education Development’s (SEED) registry, encourage and support child care workers to continue to develop their skills based on the most recently available research and recommended practices. An ideal child care system would encourage and enable current child care workers to participate in professional development activities while also supporting those interested in entering the field to secure the required training.

"My dream is to have an early learning center that is provided by a professional entity. I want child care workers to be well-trained and well-compensated. Ideally, hours would be flexible, but even [8 AM to 5 PM] would be helpful for this community. I want the facility to offer a lot of activities, outdoor time, and provide students with healthy meals. I would pay more money for quality child care." – Survey respondent

## AFFORDABLE CHILD CARE

The cost of full-time infant care at Stepping Stones was \$1,041 per month<sup>33</sup>, slightly less than the 2020-2021 statewide mean of \$1,100 (for 20 days of full-time infant care at a licensed center).<sup>34</sup> The cost for preschool-aged children was \$897 per month<sup>35</sup>, compared to the statewide mean of \$800.<sup>36</sup>

The effects of this are reflected in surveys: 42% of respondents cited high cost as a barrier to using their preferred form of care. High cost is also often present in unlicensed care. An interviewee anecdotally shared that child care is often offered on Facebook, but for approximately \$20 an hour per child.

"People are wanting \$10 - \$25 [per] kid [per hour]. It's insane what people are asking now that the daycare is closed and there's an obvious need for daycare services." – Survey respondent

Prior experiences with the high cost of child care likely contributed to just over half (55%) of survey respondents citing affordability as among the most important factors when seeking child care. The high cost of both licensed and unlicensed care is a notable barrier for parents/guardians. As discussed above, Alaska CCAP is only available to families who meet specific income requirements, and the seasonal nature of employment for many in the community may further hinder eligibility. Further, CCAP assistance can only be used with licensed providers.

In an ideal child care system, cost would not be a barrier to any family seeking care. The realities of such a system are complex: this may be any combination of subsidized tuition, sliding-scale tuition, or universal child care. When taking measures to encourage an affordable system, it is important to balance affordability with providing staff with living wages to keep quality high and turnover low.

## FLEXIBLE HOURS OF CHILD CARE

Currently, licensed child care services in Valdez are only available during the school year, and none of the current options are full-time. Additionally, none of the current preschools operate outside of business hours (Mon-Fri 9 AM - 5 PM); 24% of respondents cited child care outside of business hours as a top consideration. Both parents/guardians working jobs with nontraditional hours and those seeking to further their education with night classes require care outside of business hours. For example, more than a quarter (29%) of survey respondents said they work shift hours and many of these individuals said they work 12-hour shifts. An ideal child care system would provide sufficient care both during and outside of traditional business hours.

Many respondents also spoke to a desire for part-time, flexible and/or drop-in options, such as using services a few days a week. Several also noted that they work one week on and one week off and would like to only pay for the weeks of a month they use services rather than a full month. While convenient for families, offering this level of flexibility can be a challenge for a child care provider's financial stability.

*"This community is a community that never sleeps. Because of the oil, we really need a daycare center open 24 hours a day, because people work shifts all day."*  
- Key informant

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## CONCLUSION

While Valdez is not alone in its child care crisis, it is unique in its specific circumstances. The community's current lack of licensed child care, coupled with the high importance placed on quality licensed care by local families, illuminates a clear direction for the City of Valdez to explore. Several interviewees felt an ideal child care system would involve increased direct involvement from the City of Valdez. Many survey respondents were also in support of the City taking a role in addressing the child care issue; some such respondents expressed a desire to see the City support partners and local businesses in addressing the issue, rather than creating the solution on its own.

Additionally, most interviewed employers expressed interest in having further conversations with the City of Valdez on how to move closer to this ideal child care system. Though few respondents spoke about the role of local businesses, some comments were supporting this idea. As one individual commented, *"I don't think the City should be solely responsible for providing childcare. There are many entities in town that could pool resources and ideas to help with childcare."* Interviewees also shared additional visions for collaborative opportunities in Valdez's child care system. Suggestions varied from child care facilities partnering with local homes for the elderly to child care providers partnering with Valdez High School to develop a career pipeline.

The enthusiasm of local employers to participate in solving the crisis is indicative of the tight-knit, supportive nature of Valdez, and employers will be valuable partners in moving closer to the ideal child care system. Continued conversations are the first step to establishing and eventually leveraging community partnerships to lay the groundwork for an even stronger, healthier, and more supportive Valdez.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> United States Chamber of Commerce Foundation. (2021). *Untapped potential in AK: How childcare impacts Alaska's workforce productivity and the state economy*. [https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/sites/default/files/EarlyEd\\_ALASKA\\_2021\\_DIGITAL.pdf](https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/sites/default/files/EarlyEd_ALASKA_2021_DIGITAL.pdf)
- <sup>2</sup> McDowell Group. (March 2020.) *Valdez housing market assessment and gap analysis*. City of Valdez. <https://www.valdezak.gov/DocumentCenter/View/9553/Valdez-Housing-Market-Assessment-and-Gap-Analysis-Report-2020>
- <sup>3</sup> State of Alaska, Department of Labor and Workforce Development. (2021). *Alaska population by age, sex and borough/census area, 2010, 2020 to 2021*. [Data file]. <https://live.laborstats.alaska.gov/pop/estimates/data/AgeBySexBCA.xls>
- <sup>4</sup> State of Alaska, Department of Labor and Workforce Development. (2021). *Alaska population by age and sex, 2010, 2020 to 2021*. [Data file]. <https://live.laborstats.alaska.gov/pop/estimates/data/AgeBySexAK.xls>
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# Part 2

## CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

## CHILD DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS

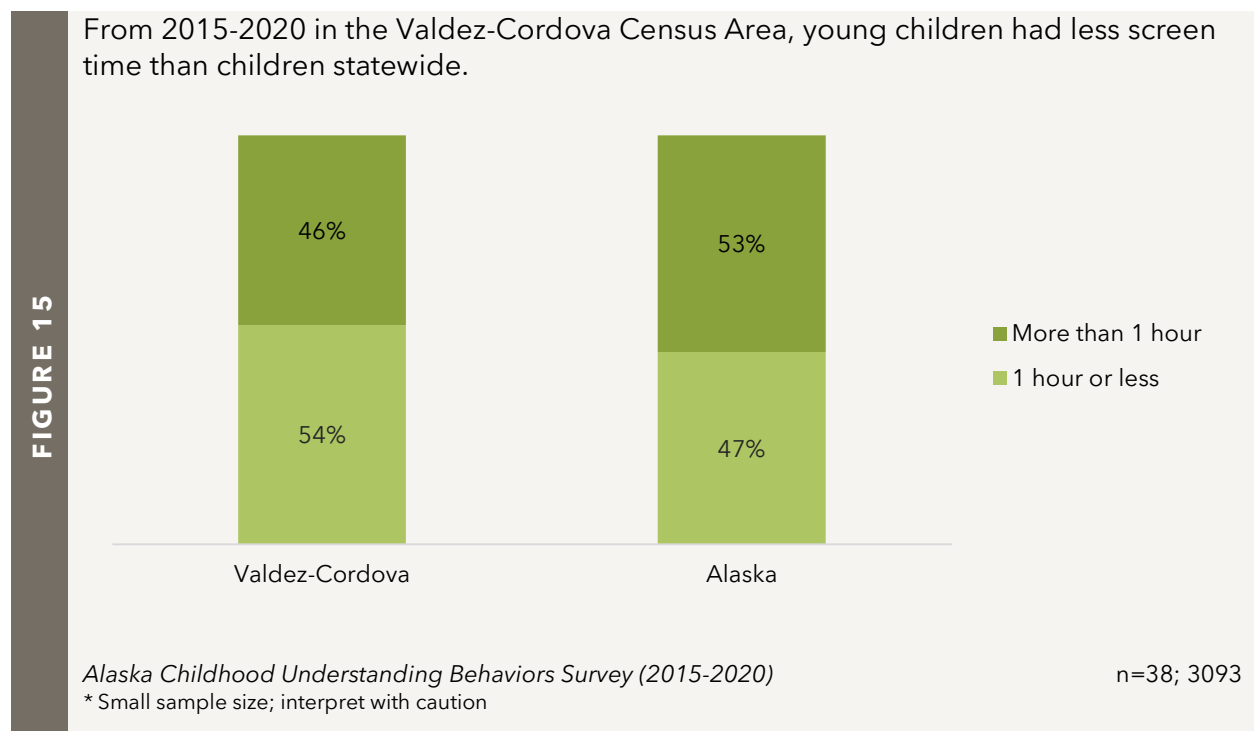
Health and development indicators provide a useful snapshot of how well Valdez’s family and child support system is meeting the needs of its young and school-aged children. This section explores indicators in the following areas:

1. Screen Time
2. Early Learning Activities
3. Early Intervention
4. School Readiness and Subject Proficiency Assessments

### SCREEN TIME

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), risks of too much screen time include obesity, poor sleep, and cognitive, language, and social-emotional delays.<sup>51</sup> The AAP recommends children under 18 months not be exposed to digital screens (e.g., televisions or computer screens) other than video chatting. Children 18 months to age two should only be exposed to high-quality programming selected and co-viewed by parents/guardians. The AAP also recommends children ages two to five have a limited screen time of one hour daily.

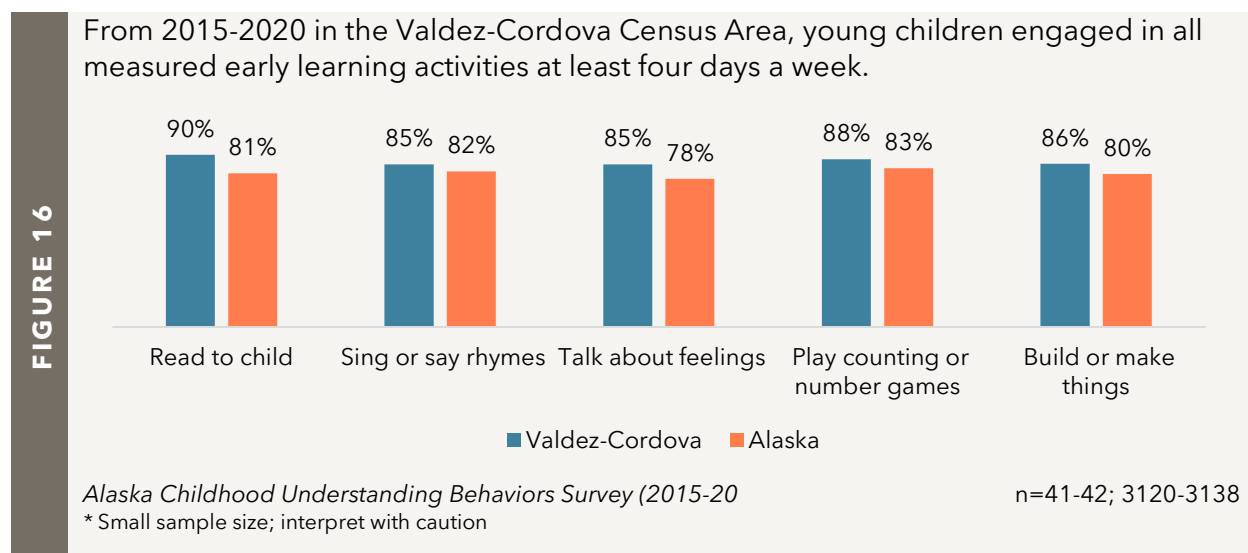
The Alaska Childhood Understanding Behaviors Survey (CUBS) is sent to a random sample of mothers across Alaska three years after giving birth. In 2015-2020, nearly half of CUBS respondents from the Valdez-Cordova Census Area said their children have more than one hour of screen time a day, a figure slightly lower than across Alaska.<sup>52</sup>





## EARLY LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Young children’s regular engagement in early learning activities is positively linked to healthy developmental outcomes. CUBS measures several early learning activities, all of which are engaged in four days a week or more by at least 86% of the 2015-2020 respondents from the Valdez-Cordova Census Area. The highest reported activity is “read to child”, engaged in regularly by 90% of CUBS respondents in this region. All activities were engaged in at a higher rate than across Alaska.<sup>53</sup>



## EARLY INTERVENTION

The purpose of early intervention services is to lessen the effects of an identified disability or developmental delay for babies/children. Early intervention services can have a significant impact on a child’s ability to learn new skills and can enhance the capacity of families to meet their child’s needs. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C and IDEA Part B are important components of Alaska’s early intervention system and help prepare children for school and maximize their independence. Services are available to every eligible child and are not income specific. Eligibility is determined based on developmental screening/evaluation.

### IDEA PART C

IDEA Part C is a program established under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1986 to provide states with resources to deliver early intervention services to eligible children up to age three and their families.<sup>54</sup> Services are designed to identify and meet a child’s needs in five developmental areas: physical development, cognitive development, communication, social and/or emotional development, and adaptive development.<sup>55</sup> In Valdez, the IDEA Part C program is administered through the Center for Community’s Early Learning Program (ELP).

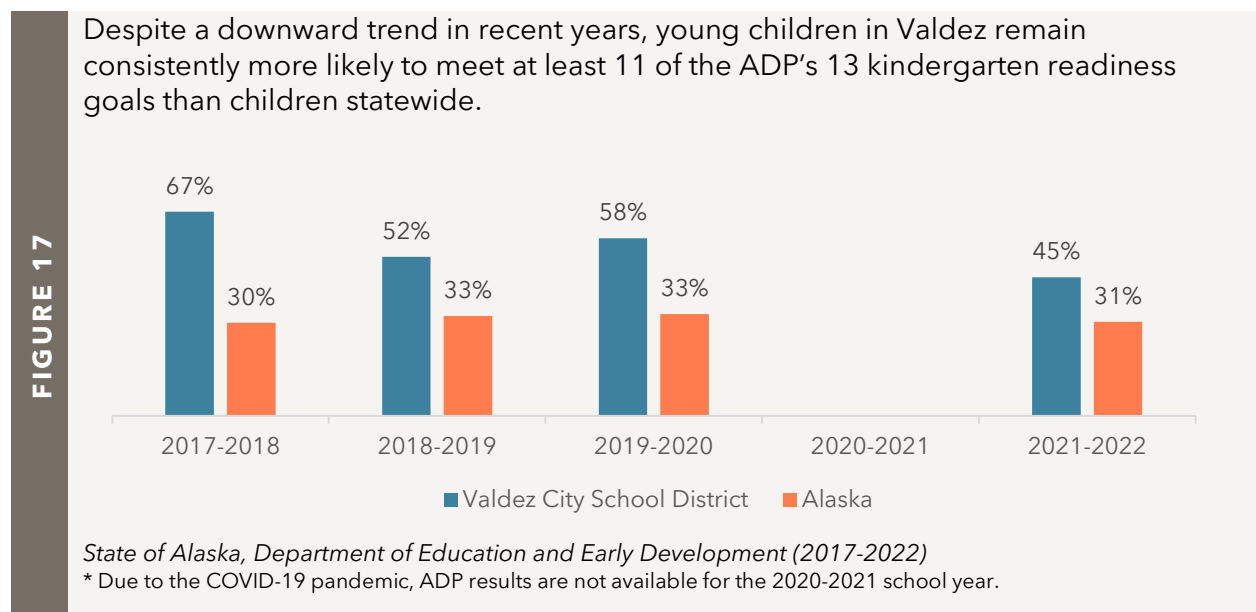
## IDEA PART B

Through the school system, IDEA Part B provides services to children and young adults with disabilities from ages three to 21. Children receiving services under IDEA Part C often transition into IDEA Part B if services are still necessary.<sup>56</sup> IDEA Part B services for 3-5-year-olds are often provided in a preschool environment. In the 2020-2021 school year, six children ages three to five (not including kindergartners) in Valdez were enrolled in IDEA Part B.<sup>57</sup> An additional 109 children and young adults (kindergarten through age 21) were served in Valdez in the 2020-2021 school year. A more specific age-based breakdown was unavailable for this report.

## SCHOOL READINESS AND SUBJECT PROFICIENCY ASSESSMENTS

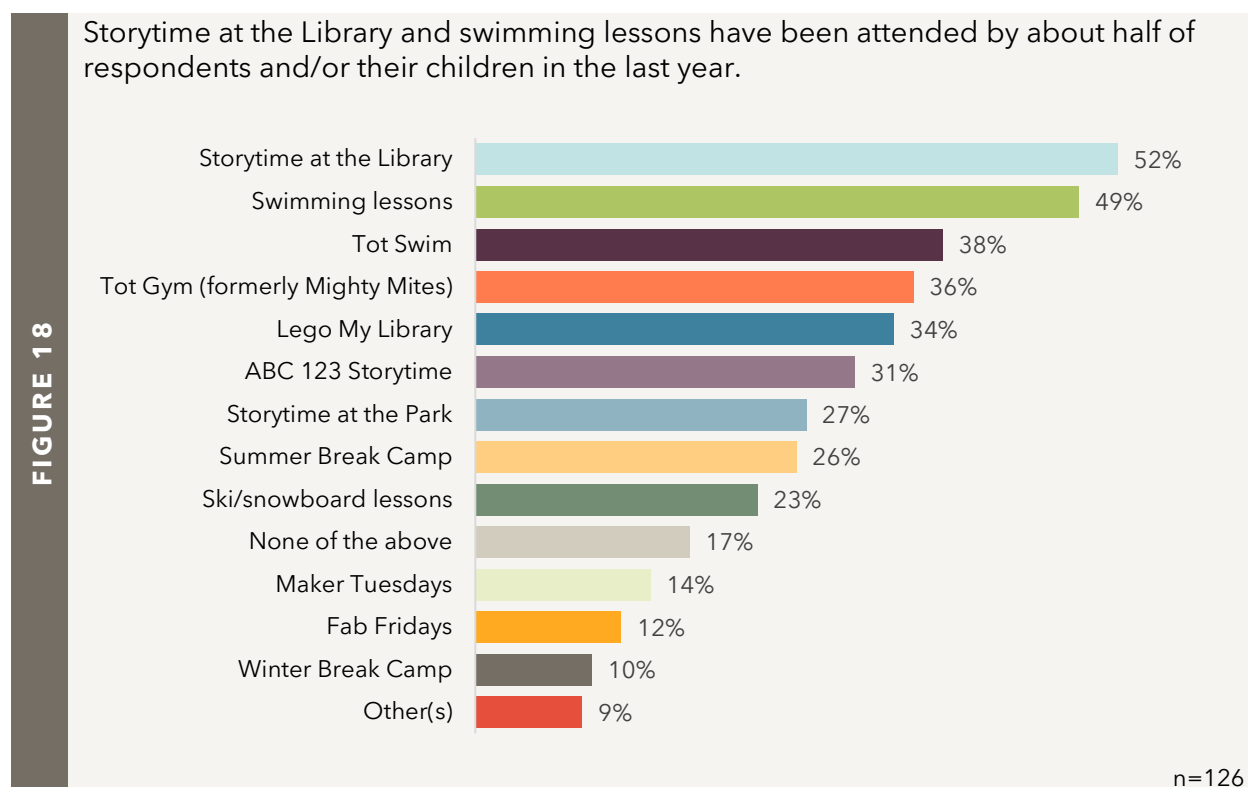
Access to child care, early learning, and social opportunities influence a young child's school readiness. Kindergarten readiness involves not just academic skills, but also social and emotional readiness, such as getting along with peers, being able to communicate effectively, and regulating emotions.<sup>58</sup> Every child in Alaska is assessed upon kindergarten entry using the Alaska Developmental Profile (ADP), an observational assessment tool that covers five domains of early learning.

In the 2021-2022 school year, 45% of Valdez children met 11 or more of the 13 kindergarten readiness goals at least 80% of the time.<sup>59</sup> Although Valdez's readiness is 14% higher than the statewide percentage, it also indicates that 55% of Valdez's children do not meet readiness goals. In Valdez, these numbers have been trending downward in recent years, while state readiness rates have remained largely consistent.<sup>60, 61, 62</sup> Reasons for this were not explored for this report.

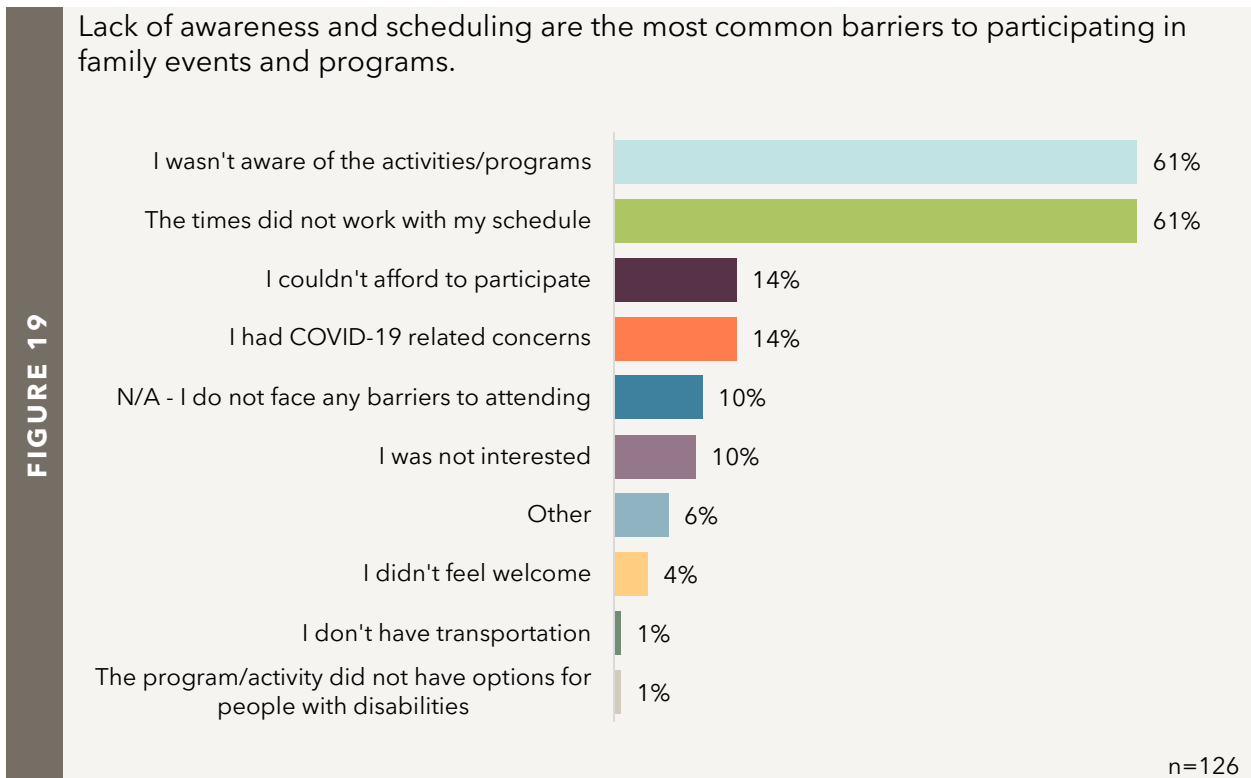


## PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

Early learning activities provide young children with opportunities to develop social, emotional, and motor skills. This section explores participation by families and/or young children in community programs and activities. Survey respondents and/or their children attended/participated in a variety of early learning and/or developmental activities in the last year. The most attended activity was Storytime at the Library, attended by 52% of respondents. Other highly attended activities included swimming lessons (49%), Tot Swim (38%), Tot Gym (36%), and Lego My Library (34%).



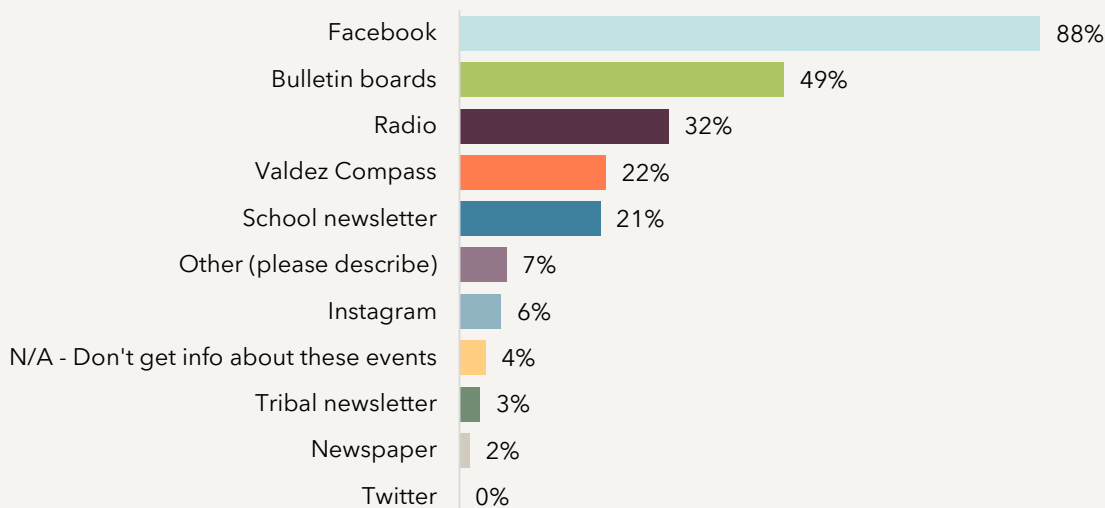
There are many reasons a family may find early learning activities important yet not attend; just 10% of respondents reported facing no barriers to attending. Lack of awareness (61%) and scheduling conflicts (61%) were the most common reasons among respondents. Only 10% did not attend due to lack of interest.



Awareness of early learning activities is a prerequisite to participation. Respondents received information about family events and activities from a variety of sources, most commonly, Facebook (88%). Nearly half (49%) received such information via bulletin boards, and one-third (32%) from the radio. Open-ended responses included the City website and word of mouth.

Facebook is the most common source of information for family events and activities.

FIGURE 20



n=126

## ENDNOTES

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## APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

To conduct this needs assessment and service planning process, Stellar Group implemented a mixed-methods approach. This appendix details each component of data collection and analysis.

### COMMUNITY SURVEY

An online survey was developed and fielded to Valdez community members through the online survey platform Survey Monkey from July 14, 2022, through August 7, 2022. The purpose of this survey was to understand parents'/guardians' child care needs and experiences. Survey respondents were offered the opportunity to enter a raffle to win one of three gift cards worth \$100 to Valdez Food Cache.

The survey received 167 total responses. Of the respondents, 145 were eligible respondents, meaning they lived in Valdez and cared for at least one child under the age of 13. Of these 145, 19 respondents completed only demographic questions; the survey received 126 valid responses. Survey data was exported from Survey Monkey and analyzed in Microsoft Excel using descriptive statistics. Open-ended comments were thematically analyzed in Microsoft Excel and qualitative analysis software Dedoose.

In a small number of instances, open-ended comments mirrored language in a question's listed options closely enough to be a listed response. For example, if a question included a list of response options including "high cost of care", and a respondent did not select this but wrote "child care cost high", this was considered equivalent to selecting the pre-listed option and was counted and analyzed as such. A copy of the community survey is included in Appendix B.

### INTERVIEWS

Interviews were conducted with two distinct groups: key informants - including current and former child care and preschool professionals - and employers, all of whom were identified by the City of Valdez Child Care Committee. Interviews were conducted between July 2022 and September 2022 via Zoom and telephone and were recorded (with permission) for transcription purposes. Interview recordings were transcribed and analyzed for themes in Dedoose. Twelve key informant and 17 employer interviews were conducted. In total, 28 interviews were completed; one individual spoke as both a key informant and an employer and one interview consisted of three individuals. Interview guides can be found in Appendix C.

Interviewed key informants included:

- » *[no organizational affiliation] - Sarah Gilmore*
- » *City of Valdez - Sharon Scheidt*
- » *Faith Harbor Fellowship - Ray Tapp*

- » *Hermon Hutchens Elementary School - Cheryl Darfield*
- » *Hermon Hutchens Elementary School - Jodi Grewe*
- » *Hermon Hutchens Elementary School - Sonya Selanoff*
- » *Puffin Learning Center [retired] - Chris Kupcyk*
- » *Stepping Stones Learning Center - Brianna Skilbred*
- » *Stepping Stones Learning Center [retired] - Darryl Verfaillie*
- » *Valdez Consortium Library - Molly Walker*
- » *Valdez Preschool - Britni Deaton*
- » *Valdez Public Health Center - Terri Lynch*

Employers identified by the City of Valdez Child Care Committee were asked about each of their company’s experiences with employees’ child care needs and supports. Employers interviewed ranged in size of workforce. Interviewed employers include:

- » *Advocates for Victims of Violence - Rowena Palomar*
- » *The Alfa Doc - Angela Alfaro*
- » *Alyeska - Fred Millen*
- » *Best Western - Scott Malone*
- » *City of Valdez - Mark Detter*
- » *Copper Valley Electric - Sharon Scheidt*
- » *Copper Valley Telecom - Rebecca Smith*
- » *First Baptist Church - David Bradley*
- » *Prince William Sound College - Dan O’Connor*
- » *Providence Valdez Medical Center - Melanee Tiura*
- » *Saint Francis Catholic Church - Frank Reitter*
- » *Safeway - Joe Valero*
- » *South Central Hardware - Myrna Plath*
- » *United States Coast Guard - Bryson Jacobs, Tim Mason, and Thomas Olsen*
- » *Valdez City Schools - Jason Weber*
- » *Valdez Food Cache - Stephanie Stock*
- » *Valdez Native Tribe - Anna Bateman*

## **CHILD CARE STORY PROJECT**

To encourage more community voices to participate in this research, Stellar Group also designed and operated a story collection project. This project encouraged any individuals with current or historical knowledge or perspectives on child care in Valdez to submit video, photo, audio, or text “stories”. The project was hosted on a dedicated website, with story submissions collected through the form-collection service Jotform. Participants were invited but not required to share identifying and/or contact information. In total, six stories were shared between July 2022 and August 2022.

## DOCUMENT & DATA REVIEW

Stellar Group reviewed a combination of publicly available and specially requested secondary data on demographics and indicators to provide context to community needs and assets. Available data has some limitations due to the small population of Valdez and the way data is reported. For example, data specific to the 0-12 age group was not available for some data points included in this report.

## ESTIMATED UNMET DEMAND

Estimated unmet demand for infants was calculated by multiplying the estimated number of children in the age group by 0.53 for the low-end estimate and 0.67 for the high-end estimate. These multipliers were derived from the survey finding that 60% (0.6) of respondents are unsatisfied with their current child care situation, with an estimated margin of error of 7% in either direction (at a 95% confidence level). This margin of error is based on a valid survey response rate of 35%; 126 valid survey responses were received and there are an estimated 363 households in Valdez with children 12 or under.<sup>63</sup> This estimate is based on the assumption that no more than one survey was completed per household, although this cannot be verified.

Low-end estimated unmet demand for preschoolers was calculated by subtracting the current estimated number of children enrolled in preschool (76) from the estimated number of children in the age group and multiplying by 0.6 (the percent of respondents unsatisfied with current care). High-end estimated unmet demand for preschoolers was calculated by multiplying the estimated number of children in the age group by 0.6.

Low-end estimated unmet demand for school-aged children was calculated by multiplying the estimated number of children in the age group by 0.44. This multiplier was derived from a statewide survey from the Afterschool Alliance that an estimated 44% of kindergarten through fifth-grade students in Alaska would participate in an afterschool program if it were available.<sup>64</sup> High-end estimated unmet demand for school-aged children was calculated by multiplying the estimated number of children in the age group by 0.6 (the percent of respondents unsatisfied with current care).

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## ENDNOTES

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## APPENDIX B: COMMUNITY CHILD CARE SURVEY

The City of Valdez is interested in hearing from families and caretakers who have children aged 12 years old and younger about their child care needs and experiences. Persons who are pregnant are also welcomed and encouraged to participate in the survey.

**As a thank you for completing this survey, your household may choose to enter a raffle to win one of three gift cards worth \$100 to [Business] by providing your name and mailing address at the end.**

You will remain anonymous unless you decide to provide contact information. In this case, you will remain confidential. Your answers will never be reported with your name attached. You are not required to complete this survey, and you may stop at any time. By continuing, you confirm you understand your rights and choose to take the survey.

### **Part 1: Getting to Know You**

Please tell us a little about yourself and your family. This information helps us better understand the child care needs of all people in Valdez.

**1. Do you currently live in Valdez?**

- Yes
- No (*You are ineligible to take this survey. Thank you for your time!*)

**2. Are you or a partner pregnant or have any children age 12 or younger living with you?**

- Yes
- No (*You are ineligible to take this survey. Thank you for your time!*)

If yes, please list their ages or that you are pregnant:

\_\_\_\_\_

**3. How would you describe your relationship with the child(ren) in your home?**

- Mother/stepmother
- Father/stepfather
- Grandparent
- Foster Parent
- Other Caregiver \_\_\_\_\_

**4. How would you describe the child(ren) in your home? Check all that apply.**

- Alaska Native
- American Indian

- Asian or Asian American
- Black or African American
- Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin
- Middle Eastern or North African
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- White
- Prefer not to disclose
- Identity not listed \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Are you or your children enrolled in any of the following programs? Check all that apply.**

- Medicaid or Denali Kid Care
- SNAP
- TANF
- WIC
- N/A Not currently enrolled in any of the above

**6. Are you or anyone in your household an active-duty service member?**

- Yes
- No

**Part 2: Child Care in Valdez**

This section explores questions about child care and your participation in family events and programs in the community.

**7. What are the best things about raising children in Valdez? Check all that apply.**

- Housing and other basic needs are affordable
- It is safe
- I have as much child care as I need
- We have access to health care services
- I have friends and/or family nearby that I can count on
- There are lots of activities here to do with children
- I know where to go for help
- I feel welcome in the community
- I feel connected to my culture
- Other(s), please describe: \_\_\_\_\_
- None of the above

**8. What makes raising children in Valdez hard? Check all that apply.**

- Housing and other basic needs are expensive
- I don't feel safe here

- I have a hard time finding child care
- I am far from friends and/or family
- There are not enough activities here to do with my children
- I don't know where to go for help
- There are health care services we need but can't get here
- I don't feel welcome in the community
- I feel disconnected from my culture
- Other(s), please describe: \_\_\_\_\_
- None of the above

**9. How would you describe your current child care situation? Check all that apply.**

- My child(ren) attends Valdez Cooperative Preschool, Valdez City Schools Pre-school or Hermon Hutchens Elementary School
- My child(ren) attends Stepping Stones
- I pay someone to care for the child(ren) in my home
- I pay someone to care for the child(ren) outside of the home
- Someone volunteers to care for the child(ren)
- I do not have child care, someone in my household stays home to care for the child(ren)
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Please provide any additional information about your response: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Which best describes your current child care satisfaction?**

- I have child care and I am satisfied with it
- I have child care, but I am seeking other options
- I sometimes have child care, but need more child care
- I am without child care and I am seeking child care
- I am without child care and I am not seeking child care

**11. What is your dream child care situation? This can include who is providing the care, how often, offerings, cost or anything that is important for your household.**

\_\_\_\_\_

**12. In your opinion, how important is it for your household to have access to \*licensed\* child care?**

- Very important
- Somewhat important
- A little important
- Not important

**13. In your opinion, how important is it for young children to participate in early learning activities? These could include events and activities outside of the home such as story time, play groups, or early childhood education programs.**

- Very important
- Somewhat important
- A little important
- Not important

**14. What are the top five most important factors to you when seeking child care?**

**Check up to five.**

- Quality
- Experience/training of the caregivers
- Safety of environment
- Culturally appropriate
- Cost
- Open during regular business hours (Mon-Fri 9-5)
- Open outside of regular business hours (weekends, evenings, etc.)
- Convenient to home
- Convenient to work
- Reliable
- Accommodations for children with special needs \_\_\_\_\_
- Other, please describe: \_\_\_\_\_
- N/A - I do not use child care for the child(ren) age 12 or younger in my home

**15. Have you and the child(ren) in your home participated in any of these activities/programs within the last year? Check all that apply.**

- ABC 123 Storytime
- Fab Fridays
- Lego my Library
- Maker Tuesdays
- Ski/snowboard lessons
- Storytime at the Library
- Storytime in the Park
- Summer break Camp (Parks and Rec)
- Swimming lessons
- Tot Gym (formerly Mighty Mites)
- Tot swim
- Winter Break Camp (Parks and Rec)
- Other(s), please describe: \_\_\_\_\_
- None of the above

**16. Where do you get information about family events and activities? Check all that apply.**

- Bulletin boards
- Facebook
- Instagram
- Newspaper
- Radio
- School newsletter
- Tribal newsletter
- Twitter
- Valdez Compass
- Other, please describe: \_\_\_\_\_
- N/A - I don't get information about family events and activities

**17. Have the following ever kept you from participating in any family activities or programs? Check all that apply.**

- I couldn't afford to participate
- I wasn't aware of the activities/programs
- I didn't feel welcome
- The times did not work with my schedule
- I don't have transportation
- The program/activity did not have options for people with disabilities
- I was not interested
- I had COVID-19 related concerns
- Other, please describe: \_\_\_\_\_
- N/A - I do not face any barriers to attending

**18. Are you aware of the following child care assistance programs? Check all that apply.**

- Alaska Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) / Parents Achieving Self Sufficiency PASS I, II, III
- Tribal Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)
- Alaska Inclusive Child Care Program / Alaska IN!
- Military Child Care Fee Assistance Program
- N/A I am not aware of the above programs

**19. Do you or your child(ren) currently receive benefits from any of the following child care assistance programs? Check all that apply.**

- Alaska Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) / Parents Achieving Self Sufficiency PASS I, II, III
- Tribal Child Care Assistance Program
- Alaska Inclusive Child Care Program / Alaska IN!

- Military Child Care Fee Assistance Program
- N/A I am not receiving benefits from any of the above programs

**Part 3: Section A: Child Care and Work**

This section explores the experience of child care and work.

**20. If you are employed, which best describes your work schedule? Check all that apply.**

- Normal business hours
- Shift work \_\_\_\_\_
- N/A I am not employed

**21. Has a lack of child care for the child(ren) age 12 or younger in your home ever been a barrier for you or someone in your household getting or keeping a job?**

- Yes
- No
- N/A No one in my household is seeking a job or working

If yes, please share any comments about your response: \_\_\_\_\_

**22. Have you ever considered moving away from Valdez due to a lack of access to child care for the child(ren) age 12 or younger in your home?**

- Yes
- No

If yes, please share any comments about your response: \_\_\_\_\_

**23. What barriers (if any) keep you from accessing your preferred form of child care for the children in your home? Check all that apply.**

- A lack of child care facilities/programs
- A lack of licensed child care facilities/programs
- It doesn't fit my schedule
- It's too expensive
- I or my spouse/partner can't afford to stay home
- Transportation to child care is a challenge
- The wait list is too long / there's no openings
- It does not have options for children with disabilities
- I live far away from friends and family
- Other, please describe: \_\_\_\_\_
- N/A I do not experience barriers

### **Part 3: Final Thoughts**

This section explores final thoughts on child care needs in Valdez.

**24. Please share any other thoughts or comments about your experience with child care in Valdez**

[open comment]

**25. As a thank you for your participation in this survey, you may enter a raffle to win one of three gift cards worth \$100 to Valdez Food Cache. If you would like to enter this raffle, please provide your full name and mailing address. As a reminder, your name will be kept separate from your responses to keep your information confidential.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you!**

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## APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDES

### KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE

#### **Background information**

In this first section, I would like to hear a little about you and your role in the community.

1. For the record, can you please state your name and your role in the community?

#### **State of Child Care in Valdez**

I'd first like to ask you about the state of childcare in Valdez and families' experiences.

2. Tell us about your community?
3. How do people support each other in Valdez?
4. How do you feel about the state of child care in Valdez?
5. Can you describe what child care looks like in Valdez?
6. What has child care in Valdez looked like historically?
7. What barriers and/or challenges are faced by families in obtaining child care?
8. What has helped families in seeking or using child care?
9. Has COVID-19 impacted families' access to child care?

#### **(If Child Care Provider)**

10. What kind of child care do you provide?
  - a. Specific curriculum, pre-k
11. Are you able to serve children with a health care need (physical or mental disabilities)
12. What is your capacity for children 12 years old and younger?
  - b. Are you operating at capacity?
  - c. Do you have a waitlist? How many families are on it?
  - d. Staff to child ratio
13. What hours/days are you open?



14. How many staff do you have?
  - a. What is their education level? Do any of them have degrees in Early Childhood or Child Development?
  - b. Do any of them participate in the SEED program and/or receive other wage incentives?
  - c. What is their average wage?
  - d. Do you offer any benefits for your employees?
  
15. Do you participate in Learn and Grow?
  - a. If yes, what level
  - b. If no, why not?
  
16. What are the biggest challenges in operating a child care center in Valdez?
  - a. What are current challenges your facility faces?
  - b. What would make it easier?

### **Improving Child Care in Valdez**

The next few questions are about improving child care in Valdez.

17. Are you aware of any previous or current efforts in the community to address child care needs?
  - a. If yes, which ones were successful or not? Why did / didn't they move forward?
  
18. In your opinion, what would an ideal child care system in Valdez look like?
  
19. What would be needed to make your vision closer to a reality?

### **Final Thoughts**

20. Is there anything I haven't asked you about that you would like to share now in regard to child care in Valdez?

## **EMPLOYER INTERVIEW GUIDE**

### **State of Child Care in Valdez**

I'd first like to ask you about the state of childcare in Valdez and families' experiences.

1. Tell us about your community?
  
2. How do people support each other in Valdez?

### **Employer Background Information**

3. Can you tell me about the company you work for and your role?

### **Employment Characteristics**

To get a better sense of families' child care needs, it's helpful to understand what families' employment looks like. This next set of questions is about your company's workforce.

4. Roughly how many people do you employ in the community?
  - a. What is the approximate percentage of full-time employees? Seasonal?
  - b. How common are shifts outside of normal business hours?

### **Child Care Awareness**

These next couple questions ask about your employees and your sense of child care needs.

5. From your perspective as a community leader, how well are families in Valdez able to meet their child care needs?
  - a. What is the main problem?
  - b. What suggestions or ideas do you have to address those needs?
6. What specific challenges have you observed that your employees face with regards to child care?
  - a. Do you feel that your employees' child care needs have an effect on your business, in terms of employee availability, retention, recruitment?
  - b. If yes, please explain.

### **Employer Resources and Aid**

There are a lot of different ways employers can accommodate their employees in securing affordable child care, including offering flexible hours, partnering with nearby providers, offering child care subsidies, or sharing child care related information with employees. This section focuses on employer resources and accommodations for employee child care.

7. Do you offer any benefits or accommodations to employees with young children?
  - a. If yes, please describe?
  - b. If no, are there any reasons your company chose not to or is unable to explore any options?
8. Are there any accommodations or benefits you would like to offer but cannot? If so, what prevents you from doing so??
  - a. If yes, in what ways would you like to expand what you offer?
    - i. What would be needed to allow you to do so?
  - b. If no, can you please expand on why not?

## **Improving Child Care in Valdez**

The next few questions are about improving child care in Valdez.

9. Are you aware of any previous or current efforts in the community to address child care needs?
  - a. If yes, which ones were successful or not? Why did / didn't they move forward?
10. In your opinion, what would an ideal child care system in Valdez look like?
11. What would be needed to make your vision closer to a reality?

## **Final Thoughts**

This is our last section and we would like to explore your general perspective as a community leader and any other information you think may be helpful in meeting child care needs in Valdez.

12. Is there anything else regarding child care and your business or employees that I haven't asked about that you'd like to share?
13. As the City of Valdez Explores options and potential public-private partnerships to address child care, would you like to be part of the conversation? If yes, we will share your name with the city and may also follow-up with you during the planning phase of this project.