ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Child care remains 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.¹

This report takes a closer look at the child care system in one particular community, Sitka, Alaska, with a specific focus on the impacts of COVID-19 and the experiences and needs of Alaska Native/American Indian families. Sitka is home to an estimated 8,387 people, including 1,222 children under the age of 13. Sitka is part of the traditional lands of the Tlingit people, who inhabited this area for thousands of years before the arrival of European settlers. The Sitka Tribe of Alaska (STA) is the federally recognized tribe of the area. There are 394 children under the age of 13 (32% of total in this age group) enrolled as tribal citizens of STA.

STA provides a variety of services and supports to tribal citizens, including management of a federal Tribal Child Care and Development Fund (Tribal CCDF) block grant, which funds the STA’s Child Care Assistance Program (STA CCAP). The purpose of this grant is to serve tribal citizens to:

» Protect the health and safety of children in child care
» Help parents make informed decisions and access information to support child development
» Provide equal access to stable child care for low-income children
» Enhance the quality of child care and the early childhood workforce

To this end, STA provides financial support to families to cover the cost of child care, and also provides support to child care providers to help with the licensing process as well as incorporating culturally responsive practices and materials, and purchasing health and safety equipment.

In addition to STA’s regular CCDF allocation, it has received approximately $800,000 in federal COVID-19 relief funds. Both its regular allocation and relief funds must be allocated and/or utilized before the end of federal fiscal year 2023. In order to inform the use of funds, STA commissioned the Stellar Group to conduct this needs assessment. Specific research questions included:

» What is the current actual capacity of child care in Sitka? How does this compare to licensed capacity? What are the reasons for any disparity between actual and licensed capacity?
» Is current capacity meeting the needs of Sitka families and children?
» Are families satisfied with their current child care?
» What barriers have families faced in accessing their preferred care?
» What barriers do child care providers face in effectively offering care?
» What unique needs and barriers are faced by Alaska Native/American Indian families and children specifically?
» How aware are families of child care assistance and support options available to them?
» What effects have COVID-19 had on Sitka’s families, children, and child care providers?

A mixed methods approach was used including a family survey receiving 132 eligible responses; interviews with key informants, large employers, and child care providers; one focus group with parents/caregivers; review of STA CCDF background documents; and analysis of publicly available data on residents of Sitka. This needs assessment will inform the development of priorities for a service plan and subsequent public information campaign.

**KEY FINDINGS**

**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN SITKA**

Most families consider early learning activities very important for children, and many engage in them with their children on a regular basis. The biggest barriers to participation in community activities and programs for children are lack of awareness and scheduling conflicts. Cost is also a barrier to participation for many families with Alaska Native/American Indian children.

**CURRENT CHILD CARE IN SITKA**

There are eight licensed child care and/or preschool providers in Sitka with a combined maximum capacity of 396 children. However, current enrollment is just 194 (53%) due to limited capacity, which is largely due to insufficient staff. Additionally, there are no weekend, early morning, late night, or drop-in options available. Culturally appropriate care is present yet limited, and all providers would be interested in partnering with STA to increase culturally appropriate programming. Further, while most providers’ staff participate in Alaska System for Early Education Development (SEED) Registry, only one program is enrolled in Learn & Grow, Alaska's Quality Recognition and Improvement System (QRIS).

While current providers are currently financially stable, many noted this is largely due to COVID-19 relief funds and remain uncertain of their financial futures. Additionally, potential new providers are deterred by a complicated and costly application process.

Many local employers noted child care as a difficulty for their current staff and/or a barrier to employee recruitment. All interviewed employers are interested in partnering with STA to better address child care needs.
FAMILY CHILD CARE EXPERIENCES AND NEEDS

By and large, the biggest challenges for families in accessing the child care they need are the lack of available child care slots and the high cost of care. Additionally, Alaska Native/American Indian families are more likely than their peers to prioritize care for children with special needs and care outside of regular business hours, both of which are gaps in Sitka’s current system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This is an unprecedented time. While short-term solutions are required to address the immediate child care crisis, longer-term systemic approaches, including advocacy and innovate solutions, are equally important. The following recommendations explore both short-term and long-term horizons.

RECOMMENDATION I: Provide supplemental funding for wages to help existing providers increase capacity

As highlighted in this needs assessment, the greatest immediate need for families in Sitka is increased capacity in the child care system. Current providers are not operating at their licensed capacity, primarily due to staffing shortages and to a smaller degree space constraints. STA is able to provide supplemental, short-term funding to child care providers to support their operations and supplement staff wages. These include but not are limited to providing grants to providers for supplemental wages to attract and retain staff, as well as to provide hiring bonuses and offer paid professional development.

RECOMMENDATION II: Ensure increased capacity, both short-term and long-term, addresses specific needs of tribal families

Currently, many of STA’s CCDF-related decisions are closely correlated with the state’s approach. However, this needs assessment highlights unique needs faced by Alaska Native families in Sitka. As such, any efforts to increase capacity, as well as existing capacity, should ensure these needs are addressed, including:

» Evening / weekend care to accommodate families working non-traditional hours
» Sufficient staff training and resources to ensure high-quality care to children with special needs
» Culturally appropriate programming

RECOMMENDATION III: Develop an early childhood education advocacy agenda

The COVID-19 pandemic has put a spotlight on long-simmering equity issues that influence families access to care, and the sustainability of the providers who offer child care services. While the supplemental funds can provide short-term relief, fostering long-term, systemic change requires a voice at the table. Developing an advocacy agenda to ensure STA is a participant in local, state, and federal conversations regarding child care would increase the
likelihood that proposed solutions will also meet the needs of tribal children and families, and any short-term capacity gains can be sustained once supplemental funding has run out.

**RECOMMENDATION IV:** *Consider a child care center partnership with other large employers to subsidize costs and increase community-wide capacity*

While traditional approaches such as stipends for professional development and wage supplements are useful for addressing immediate concerns, standard solutions have failed to solve the child care crisis. As such, it is valuable to consider more innovative solutions. One approach may be to foster partnerships with other large, local employers to develop a child care center. Shared costs and administrative duties would ease the burden on any one organization, while simultaneously increasing community-wide capacity and potentially enabling higher wages and/or benefits to staff members. There is significant interest in this approach from other large employers in Sitka.

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INTRODUCTION

Child care remains 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.1 This report examines the child care system in one particular community in the state, Sitka, with a specific focus on the impacts of COVID-19 and the experiences and needs of Alaska Native/American Indian families.

The City and Borough of Sitka is part of the traditional lands of the Tlingit people, who inhabited this area for thousands of years prior to the arrival of European settlers. Today, most residents identify as White and/or Alaska Native, although members of several other racial and ethnic groups call the community home. Sitka is home to an estimated 8,387 people, including 1,222 children under the age of 13. This includes 394 children who are tribally enrolled citizens of the Sitka Tribe of Alaska (32% of children in this age group).

The Sitka Tribe of Alaska (STA) is the federally recognized Tribe of the area. The mission of STA is: to exercise sovereign rights and powers, to preserve the integrity of tribal society, and to improve the lives of individual Tribal Citizens. As part of its work, STA provides a variety of services and supports to Tribal citizens, including the management of a federal Tribal Child Care and Development Fund (Tribal CCDF) block grant. The purpose of Tribal CCDF is to:

- Protect the health and safety of children in child care
- Help parents make informed decisions and access information to support child development
- Provide equal access to stable child care for low-income children
- Enhance the quality of child care and the early childhood workforce

Funding amounts are based on a tribe’s population size of children under age 13. STA is a small-allocation grantee, meaning that it receives less than $250,000 annually, and is exempt from many of the CCDF requirements, including the need to offer child care vouchers, although STA continues to do so. In addition to the regular Tribal CCDF allocations, STA has received additional funds to address the child care crisis through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act, and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). Most of these supplemental funds must be spent or allocated by the end of federal fiscal year 2023. In addition to STA’s supplemental funding, the State Child Care Program Office (CCPO) and other Tribal CCDF programs have also received supplemental funding for child care. In addition, many local governments have made other supplemental relief funds available to child care providers. The surge in one-time funding for child care has created an
unprecedented opportunity for STA and the community to address long-standing needs and gaps.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
The purpose of this needs assessment is to understand both the current state of Sitka’s child care system and how it has been affected by COVID-19. While the perspectives of the entire community is included, the experiences of Alaska Native/American Indian families are a particular focus throughout. Specific research questions include:

» What is the current actual capacity of child care in Sitka? How does this compare to licensed capacity? What are the reasons for any disparity between actual and licensed capacity?
» Is current capacity meeting the needs of Sitka families and children?
» Are families satisfied with their current child care?
» What barriers have families faced in accessing their preferred care?
» What barriers do child care providers face in effectively offering care?
» What unique needs and barriers are faced by Alaska Native/American Indian families and children specifically?
» How aware are families of child care assistance and support options available to them?
» What effects have COVID-19 had on Sitka’s families, children, and child care providers?

This needs assessment will inform the development of priorities for a service plan and subsequent public information campaign.

METHODOLOGY
To conduct this needs assessment, Stellar Group implemented a mixed-methods approach. This included a community survey of parents/caregivers of children under 13; a focus group of parents/caregivers; interviews with key informants, key employers identified by STA, and child care providers; and document and data review. The full methodology is included in Appendix A.
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN SITKA

Childhood is a critical time of development and learning, and an important time for a child’s family as well. During this time in a child’s life, families often utilize a variety of services, including child care and before- and/or after-school programming. Access to services is influenced by many factors, including families’ income and access to transportation, as well as which providers exist in the community. Additional indicators, such as frequency of early learning and socialization activities, may also influence a child’s development. Sitka’s larger family and child support system includes services and programming for children of all ages that support healthy development.

This section explores the current status of children and families in Sitka. It contains five subsections:

1. Demographics: population information, race and ethnicity, and low-income status of families with children
2. Public Assistance Program Usage: spending of and enrollment in public assistance programs such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)
3. Child Development: child health and development indicators, such as participation in early learning activities and early intervention services as school assessment outcomes
4. Community Programs and Activities: importance placed by parents/caregivers on participation in Sitka programs and activities and barriers to participation
5. Benefits and Challenges to Raising Children in Sitka: parents’/caregivers’ perspectives on the best and most challenging parts of raising children in Sitka

DEMOGRAPHICS

To fully understand how well the needs of children and their families are being met, it is important to first understand who these children and families are. This subsection discusses the population, race and ethnicity, and socio-economic status of those who call Sitka home.

POPULATION

As of 2021, Sitka is home to an estimated 8,387 people, including 1,222 children under the age of 13, 542 (44%) of which are between the ages of zero and five. As of 2019, 394 children between the ages of zero and 12 are registered members of STA, accounting for 32% of children in this age group.
The Coast Guard Air Station in Sitka also has 200 active-duty Guardsmen with a total of 500 dependents, according to key informants. While it is not known how many of these dependents are children in this age group, it is important to consider the needs of these more transient community members and their impacts on the community’s services and needs.

In recent years, Sitka’s overall population has been on the decline. Sitka had approximately 820 fewer residents in 2021 than in 2011, a 9% decrease. The number of children in Sitka has also decreased significantly. In this same period, the number of 0-12 year-olds decreased by 29%, from 1725 to 1222 children.\(^3\)
Birth Rate and Number of Births

Birth rate is defined as the number of live births per 1,000 residents in a given time period. This measure allows the comparison of the relative number of births over time while accounting for year-to-year differences in a community’s overall population. Over the past five years, Sitka has had a relatively stable birth rate, which is consistently lower than the state’s rate. In 2020, for every 1,000 residents of Sitka, there were 10.2 births.

Importantly, the actual number of births in a community influences the resources the community will need to support young children and families. Such resources include child care, early intervention services, and future school enrollment. The average number of annual births in Sitka from 2016 to 2020 was 84. For Alaska Native mothers, the number of births decreased in 2017 and 2018 but reached similar levels in 2020 as they had been in 2016. In each year, there were less than six Sitka births by teen mothers (age 15-19); none were Alaska Native teen mothers except in 2020.
SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

Income status influences a family’s ability to meet basic needs and access their preferred child care, healthcare, and/or social supports. While being low-income is among the requirements to qualify for Head Start as well as both State and STA CCAP, it is important to note that parents/caregivers may be only slightly above income requirements and thus ineligible for such assistance. For seasonal workers, eligibility may fluctuate throughout the year due to variations in income.

Further, U.S. Census and American Community Survey estimates for poverty rates in Alaska do not account for the adjusted federal poverty level (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% of FPL.\textsuperscript{6}

Sitka’s families (defined as two or more relatives in one household) who identify as Alaska Native/American Indian alone are four times more likely to live below 100% FPL than families of any race/ethnicity.\textsuperscript{7} There are a number of factors that influence this, including historical trauma from colonization of Native families and lands and current-day experiences of racism and discrimination.\textsuperscript{8} Lifestyle choices may also impact one’s economic standing, such as engaging in a subsistence lifestyle (rather than solely using a cash economy) or staying home with children rather than working.

As of 2019, 9% of all families with children in Sitka live below 100% FPL.\textsuperscript{9} Families who are headed by a single female are much more likely to be in poverty.\textsuperscript{10} Data on single-male-headed families, as well as families of unmarried couples, is not available for this report.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\begin{tikzpicture}
\begin{axis}[
    ybar, 
    bar width=25pt, 
    xtick=data, 
    y tick label style={/pgf/number format/.cd, fixed}, 
    xticklabels={Families of any race/ethnicity, Families who identify as AN/AI alone}, 
    y label style={at={(axis description cs:0.5,-0.1)}, anchor=north}, 
    width=\textwidth, 
    height=0.3\textwidth, 
]
\addplot coordinates {(1,5) (2,23)}; 
\end{axis}
\end{tikzpicture}
\caption{Families in Sitka who identify as Alaska Native/American Indian alone are four times more likely to live below the FPL than families of any race/ethnicity.}
\end{figure}

\textit{United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables (2019)}

\textsuperscript{*}Large margin of error, interpret with caution.
TRANSPORTATION

Access to reliable transportation has been linked to economic mobility, or one’s ability to overcome poverty or otherwise drastically change their income. It also allows families greater access to employment opportunities and education. Some survey respondents noted transportation as a barrier to accessing their preferred form of child care.

Three-quarters (75%) of Sitka workers age 16 and over get to work by driving or carpooling. Fourteen percent of workers walk to work, and just 1% currently regularly utilize public transit. Four percent of workers in Sitka age 16 and over work from home.

PUBLIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAM USAGE

Public assistance programs play a critical role in helping many families address their needs and minimize stress caused by challenges. The following table summarizes enrollment in multiple forms of public assistance available in Sitka from 2017 to 2021 with a focus on...
children and families up to age 12. This includes the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), as well as state and tribal CCAP programs. In addition to state and tribal CCAP, there is also a child care subsidy program by the U.S. Coast Guard. Data on enrollment in this program was not available for this report. Enrollment is reported below as total recipients ages 12 and under. Program descriptions follow.

**TABLE 1: SITKA PUBLIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAM ENROLLMENT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2021</th>
<th>% Change 2017-2021</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SNAP (0-12)</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>-35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TANF (0-12)</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>-46%</td>
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<tr>
<td>AK CCAP (0-12)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>19 *</td>
<td>-58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STA CCAP (0-12)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>unknown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

**SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SNAP)**

SNAP is a federally funded nutrition assistance program for income-eligible families. The number of children ages 12 and under in Sitka receiving SNAP benefits has been decreasing in recent years, from 254 in 2017 to 165 in 2021. In contrast, SNAP enrollment statewide changed by less than 1% for all age groups from 2017 to 2021.

**TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE FOR NEEDY FAMILIES (TANF)**

TANF is a federally funded, income-eligible program intended to assist families in meeting basic and immediate needs to promote self-sufficiency and positive familial outcomes. The number of Sitka children ages 12 and under receiving state TANF benefits has also decreased in each reported year. Similarly, there has been a 37% decrease in program enrollment statewide from 2017 to 2021 across all age groups. Tribal TANF participation was not available for this report.

**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. Despite a temporary increase in enrollment in 2019, State CCAP enrollment has been trending down in recent years. In 2017, 45 0-12-year-olds in Sitka were receiving state CCAP assistance, compared to 19 in 2021. At the state level, enrollment in State CCAP has decreased by 40% during this period, slightly lower than the Sitka rate of change.


**STA CHILD CARE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (TRIBAL CCAP)**

STA also provides child care assistance for eligible families through the Tribal CCAP. In order to qualify, applicants must first apply to state-provided CCAP. In cases where a state CCAP applicant is ineligible or receives an insufficient allocation, they may then apply for Tribal CCAP through STA. Limited data is available on historical STA CCAP enrollment. In 2020, 11 children received assistance, compared to seven in 2021. This data was provided via personal communication with a representative of STA.

**CHILD DEVELOPMENT**

Health and development indicators provide a useful snapshot of how well Sitka’s family and child support system is meeting the needs of its young and school-aged children.

**HEALTH OF BABIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN**

**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. 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. The AAP also recommends children ages 2-5 have a limited screen time of one hour daily.

In 2019-2020, just over half of respondents to the Childhood Understanding Behaviors Survey (CUBS) from Alaska’s Southeast public health region (Southeast) said their children have more than one hour of screen time a day, a figure slightly higher than across Alaska.

![Figure 8](image)

*Figure 8: Over half of children from Southeast exceed AAP recommendations of daily screen time.*

Alaska Childhood Understanding Behaviors Survey (2019-2020)
Early Learning Activities

Young children’s regular engagement in early learning activities is positively linked to healthy developmental outcomes. The CUBS survey measures several early learning activities, all of which are engaged in four days a week or more by at least 90% of 2019-2020 respondents from Southeast public health region. The highest reported activity is “sit down and eat a meal together”, engaged in regularly by 98% of CUBS respondents in this region. All activities were engaged in at a higher rate than across Alaska.\(^2\)

![Figure 9: In Southeast, most mothers report engaging in all early learning activities measured by CUBS at least four days a week.](image)

**Alaska Childhood Understanding Behaviors Survey (2019-2020)**

**EARLY INTERVENTION**

The purpose of early intervention services is to lessen the effects of 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 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 children up to
age three and their families. Services are designed to identify and meet a child’s needs in five developmental areas: physical development, cognitive development, communication, social or emotional development, and adaptive development.

In Sitka, the IDEA Part C program is administered through the Center for Community’s Early Learning Program (ELP). On average, ELP receives 40-45 referrals annually which come from physicians, parents, the Office of Children’s Services (OCS), lactation specialists, and child care centers. The program offers services by occupational therapists and speech language pathologists, as well as developmental specialists. Services have been offered virtually since the onset of COVID-19 in March 2020. According to ELP staff, some parents have opted out of virtual sessions, although some report they find it beneficial and wish to continue using virtual and/or hybrid services. More specific information was not available due to the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) website outage that affected program reporting in 2021.

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, and additional children may be identified and enrolled in services who are ages 3-5. IDEA Part B services for 3-5-year-olds are often provided in a preschool environment. In the 2019-2020 school year, 26 children ages 3-5 (not including kindergartners) in Sitka were enrolled in Part B. Services for older children are provided through the school district. An additional 132 children and young adults (kindergarten through age 21) were served in Sitka in the 2019-2020 school year. A more specific age-based breakdown was unavailable for this report.

SCHOOL READINESS AND SUBJECT PROFICIENCY ASSESSMENTS
Kindergarten Readiness
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. Every child in Alaska is assessed using the Alaska Developmental Profile (ADP) an observational assessment tools that covers five domains of early learning, upon kindergarten entry.

In the 2019-2020 school year, 41% of Sitka children met 11 or more of the 13 kindergarten readiness goals at least 80% of the time. Although Sitka’s readiness is 8% higher than the statewide percentage, it also indicates that 59% of Stika children do not meet readiness goals.
Performance Evaluation for Alaska’s Schools (PEAKS)
The annual Performance Evaluation for Alaska’s Schools (PEAKS) assessment measures the English Language Arts and Mathematics proficiency level of Alaskan third through ninth graders. Starting in the 2022 school year, Alaska will use a new assessment tool to measure proficiency in subjects.

Achieving literacy by third grade is correlated with post-secondary success; students who are not proficient are more likely to drop out of high school before graduating, which increases their likelihood of becoming low-income adults and less skilled for employment. Knowing the rate of proficiency in the 3rd grade English assessment provides insight into how many students may be at risk for these outcomes. Achievement in mathematics builds foundational competencies in children and is a strong indicator of later success for children not only in math but in reading and language skills as well. Understanding the rate of math proficiency among 3rd grade students can indicate the potential future academic success of students.

In Sitka, Alaska Native/American Indian third and sixth graders performed below student averages on the PEAKS assessment to varying degrees. Within Mathematics there was very little difference between Alaska Native/American Indian students and the grade average for third graders, but a larger difference among sixth graders.

This disparity does not necessarily reflect a difference in students’ aptitude. Rather, cultural differences and institutionally embedded biases, both within and outside of the school system, can influence children’s opportunities and subsequent school performance. Some key informants spoke to the bias that Alaska Native students experience in the school system and its impacts on their experience and academic outcomes.
COMMUNITY PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

STA, various local organizations, and the City of Sitka offer many recurring and/or ongoing programs for children and their families. These programs offer socialization opportunities for children and, in certain instances, for their parents/caregivers as well. Socialization is an important part of a child’s development and is also a protective factor for parents. Additionally, certain programs emphasize culturally relevant, educational, and/or physical activity opportunities. This section explores families’ experiences with the programs and activities available in the community.

IMPORTANCE PLACED ON PARTICIPATION

Roughly nine in 10 survey respondents (89%) feel that it is very important for young children to participate in early learning activities. There is little variation between respondents with or without Alaska Native/American Indian children or by age of respondent’s children. An additional 10% of respondents feel participation in early learning activities is somewhat important; none feel that it is not important. Illustrating this perspective, one survey respondent noted, “These early experiences help set up a community and culture of learning, exploration and socialization that expand horizons.” However, several respondents also shared that COVID-19 safety concerns impact their attendance even if they believe these activities to be important.
PARTICIPATION

Sitka families can participate in a variety of activities and programs. While some have an associated fee, there are also several no-cost options available as well. The availability of programs and activities listed in the survey were affected by COVID-19, as noted by several survey respondents in open-ended survey responses.

Among respondents with Alaska Native/American Indian children, roughly one-third participate in open swim, Books & Babies, and/or Imagination Library. Story time at the library and Hames Center Family Fun Time are also attended by about one-quarter of these respondents. Boys/Girls on the Run was significantly less common for these respondents than their peers. Of those who noted ‘other’ activities/programs, many cited different sports, such as soccer and basketball.

FIGURE 12

Nine in 10 respondents feel it is very important for young children to participate in early learning activities.

- Very important: 89%
- Somewhat important: 10%
- A little important: 1%
- Not important: 0%

N = 132
There are also several programs in the community designed specifically for Alaska Native/American Indian children and their families. Of these programs, about one-quarter of respondents said their children participate in the Sitka Native Education Program (SNEP) Tlingit Language & Culture program, and about one-fifth have children who participate in STA’s open gym time and/or STA’s Cultural Family Fun Days. Across all of these programs, only one respondent without Alaska Native/American Indian children said their children participate in the Tlingit Language & Culture program.

Most programs targeted towards Alaska Native children and families are attended by about one-fifth to one-quarter of respondents with Alaska Native/American Indian children.
Only 13% of respondents (N=17) do not attend any programs or activities listed in the survey and did not write in any additional activities. Two-thirds (65%) of these individuals have an Alaska Native/American Indian child in their home. Among these individuals, 69% feel it is very important for young children to participate in early learning activities, suggesting it is not a lack of interest that keeps them from participating. Many (41%) only have children in the 6-12 age group.

**BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION**

Lack of awareness is the most common barrier to participating in programs/activities, reported by 78% of all respondents. (See Appendix D for respondents’ sources of information about programs.) As one respondent noted, “We would participate more if we knew when they were happening.” Scheduling conflicts were also common. Related to scheduling conflicts, one survey respondent pointed out, “A lot seems built around a stay-at-home mom model, and I work, so weekday daytime activities are out.”

Respondents with Alaska Native/American Indian children are more than twice as likely to report prohibitive cost as a barrier as their peers (35% and 14%, respectively). Lack of transportation is also a more common barrier to participation for these respondents (13% vs. 3%). Conversely, lack of interest is cited as a barrier twice as often by respondents without Alaska Native/American Indian children as their peers. Other challenges noted by respondents include community dynamics, and one person noted, “It was too difficult to accomplish without help for my kids.”

Among survey respondents, lack of awareness is the most common barrier cited to participation in programs/activities.

![Figure 15](image-url)
Among respondents who report not attending any listed programs or activities and did not write any additional activities in (N=17; 13%), there were similar trends. Eight in 10 say lack of awareness has kept them from participating. Additionally, 50% have experienced scheduling conflicts, and 31% report prohibitive cost as a barrier – a rate higher than the total respondents. Adding further context, 88% of these respondents cited housing and other basic needs being expensive among things that make raising children in Sitka hard. There were no significant differences in this group between those with Alaska Native/American Indian children in their homes and their peers.

**BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF RAISING CHILDREN IN SITKA**

Community survey respondents provided feedback about what they believe to be the best parts of raising children in Sitka, and what is the most challenging, providing insight into families’ experiences in the community.

Among survey respondents, around three-quarters said they feel safe, and more than half said they feel welcome in the community. Around a third of respondents with Alaska Native/American Indian children also said they know where to go for help, feel connected to their culture, and that they have a lot of activities to do with their children.

Other identified positive attributes of raising children in Sitka included the close connection with nature, having family close by, and a few respondents noted the short commute to services and school. One person noted, “I feel like Sitka is a fairly tight-knit community.”
Survey respondents also shared what they find challenging about raising children in Sitka. More than 90% said that housing/basic needs are expensive, and more than one-half said that they have a hard time finding child care. Among respondents with Alaska Native/American Indian children, respondents were more likely to say there aren’t enough activities to do with their children than those who said having many activities available was a benefit of living in the community (as shown in Figure 16).

Other identified challenges include the cost of child care (as opposed to the noted lack of availability) and geographic isolation. One respondent with an Alaska Native/American Indian child also noted, “There is subtle racism from parents on playground and other places.”
The most commonly reported challenge to raising children in Sitka is the high cost of housing/basic needs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>AN/AI Children</th>
<th>All children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing and other basic needs are expensive</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a hard time finding child care</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are not enough activities here to do with my children</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am far from friends and/or family</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are health care services we need but can’t get here</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel disconnected from my culture</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other(s)</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t feel welcome in the community</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t know where to go for help</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t feel safe here</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 95 ; 132
CURRENT CHILD CARE IN SITKA

Within Sitka, eight providers offer child care and/or preschool services. More specifically, this includes three preschools, three child care providers, one dual child care and preschool provider, and an afterschool program. Most child care providers are located in the central part of town, and all are located on a transit route of RIDE Sitka public transit. All of these programs are private pay models, except Wooch.een Yei Jigaxtoonei (Wooch.een) Preschool, a Head Start program offered in partnership between Sitka School District, STA, and Central Council Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska (CCTHITA). As a public program, it is free for participating families.

Unlike child care providers, preschools must employ teachers that have valid teacher certificates, follow the Alaska Early Learning Guidelines, conduct assessments for each child, and complete end-of-year reporting to the State of Alaska Department of Education and Early Development.34

This report explores child care in Sitka across four areas:

» Child Care Availability and Access
» Child Care Staffing
» Child Care Quality
» Efforts to Address Child Care Needs

CHILD CARE AVAILABILITY AND ACCESS

The total licensed capacity of the child care and preschool providers in Sitka is 369, although some children may enroll in preschool morning and afternoon sessions, slightly lowering the total actual capacity. At each site, licensed capacity ranges from eight children to 99. Additionally, the Ventures Program is only for school-aged children. This lowers the total potential capacity of preschools and child care for young children to 299. Although, it may be lower, as other programs may also serve school-aged children as part of their capacity.

All child care providers in Sitka offer services Monday through Friday, with the earliest opening at 7:30 AM and the latest offering care until 6:00 PM. There are no services for weekends, late nights, or early mornings, and none offer drop-in options. The three preschools are only open during the school year, meaning families who use their services need to find alternative care options for three months out of the year. One of the preschools, Mt. Edgecumbe Preschool, offers full-day extended care, and 3 to 5 Preschool offers extensions up to 45 minutes for either morning or afternoon classes.
TABLE 2: SITKA CHILD CARE CAPACITY AND WAITLISTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provider</th>
<th>Age Groups Licensed to Serve</th>
<th>Licensed Capacity</th>
<th>Current Enrollment</th>
<th>Current Waitlist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 to 5 Preschool</td>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>25 AM 25 PM</td>
<td>15 AM 10 PM</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mt. Edgecumbe Preschool</td>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>22 AM 22 PM</td>
<td>21 AM 15 PM</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wooch.een Yei Jigaxtoonei Preschool</td>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>20 AM 20 PM</td>
<td>18 AM 0 PM</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheldon Jackson Child Care Center</td>
<td>Infant, Toddler, Preschool</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty Eliason Child Care Center</td>
<td>Infant, Toddler, Preschool, School-age</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kids First Day Care</td>
<td>Infant, Toddler, Preschool, School-age</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roots and Boots Kid Care</td>
<td>Toddler, Preschool, School-age</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ventures Program</td>
<td>School-age</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


However, providers are not currently operating at their licensed capacity due to COVID-19 safety concerns as well as staffing challenges. Current enrollment across all programs is 194 children (depending on full-day preschool enrollment), or just 53% of the total licensed capacity. Until March 2022, Wooch.een Preschool was held virtually since the beginning of the pandemic. While it is now considered safe for in-person sessions at a limited capacity, virtual delivery had continued until March due to staffing shortages, illustrating the impact of the lack of workforce in the community. During virtual delivery, parents/caregivers still needed to be present with children while they attend. At the beginning of March 2022, the morning preschool class started in-person, with two new staff hired, although at the time of this report, the afternoon class is on pause due to insufficient staffing.
“There is no space for kids right now. There is a long list, and I was told she wouldn’t even put me down because of the long list of kids on the waitlist.” – Survey respondent with a child age 6-12

The total waitlist across all providers is 116 children, however, true need may be higher, as some survey respondents indicated that they have sought other options to fill their child care needs due to the long waitlists. One respondent shared that a local provider would not add them to a waitlist because of its extensive length. While three providers are licensed to care for infants, staffing challenges reduce their capacity to do so; one provider of infant care was forced to shut down their infant room during COVID-19 due to losing infant room staff.

EFFECTS OF LIMITED SPACE

The number of children a provider is licensed to serve is directly correlated with facility space; the larger a facility is, the more children it has the potential to become licensed for. Additionally, a provider’s full-time access to their facility (as opposed to seasonal access, for example) increases their ability to provide more frequent care. Multiple providers described their facility’s size or limited availability as a barrier to providing the level of care they would like to offer. For example, one provider who currently leases their facility is unable to offer care in the summertime or on Fridays due to their leasing agreement.

CHILD CARE FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

While all providers serve children with special needs on a case-by-case basis, many noted they do not currently have adequate staffing and/or resources to do so. One key informant also shared that many child care staff do not have the ability and/or training to meet the needs of children with special needs. They also noted that many children receiving services for special needs have regulation issues, which can often be incorrectly labeled as behavior problems. Caring for children with special needs without proper training and support can increase suspensions or expulsions of children from child care programs. Additionally, insufficient training can lead to staff burnout, which has been linked to increased turnover.

In survey data, almost one-fifth of respondents with Alaska Native/American Indian children in both age groups (19% ages 0-5; 17% ages 6-12) said that accommodations for special needs is one of the most important considerations when selecting a child care provider. There was very little difference between these respondents and those without Alaska Native/American Indian children. In the survey, some spoke to challenges finding child care providers who can offer such accommodations. As one individual shared, “I have found that there are difficulties for each model of care. In a program they may lack enough folks to assist children, especially
those that have special needs.” Another shared, “There’s no place for special needs children for after school.”

COST OF CARE

Child care is notoriously expensive at all levels: national, state, and local. Based on a recent Alaska Market Survey conducted in 2020-2021, the typical cost for a child in Alaska is $850 per month for full-time care.37 Within Sitka, the average price for full-time child care is $1,000 per month, 16% higher than the state rate. Prices are higher in Sitka for each age group. However, child care rate systems are complex, and a family’s rates may be impacted by many factors, such as full-time, part-time, and extended care hours. Some providers also offer discounts for siblings. Only Wooch.een Preschool offers tuition-free services due to its status as a Head Start program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Sitka*</th>
<th>Statewide**</th>
<th>% Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infant</td>
<td>$1,247</td>
<td>$1,025</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toddler</td>
<td>$1,071</td>
<td>$950</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>$949</td>
<td>$850</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-age</td>
<td>$735</td>
<td>$580</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Some families use State or Tribal CCAP to help cover the cost of child care, as noted in Table 1 on page 8. However, as shown in the table, enrollment in both programs has been on the decline in recent years.

Child Care Provider Financial Stability

As in any business, financial stability is crucial for longevity and quality of services. Within child care settings, providers must work hard to cover operating costs and also offer affordable rates for families. A recent report published by the U.S. Department of the Treasury found that staff expenses alone account for 50-60% of operating budgets.38

Child care providers in Sitka shared during interviews that while they currently are financially stable, this is in large part due to COVID-19 federal relief funds that were made available through the CARES, CRRSA, and ARPA acts. Providers shared concerns about how they will maintain this stability once those funds are no longer available. This is similar to findings of a national survey of child care providers in which 75% reported that the end of these relief funds would have negative/highly negative impacts on their program.39
Sitka child care providers accessed federal relief funds through a variety of sources, including:

- Alaska Community Foundation
- City of Sitka
- Sitka Tribe of Alaska
- State of Alaska Child Care Program Office
- thread

Several providers also received support through the Paycheck Protection Program created by the U.S. Small Business Administration. This program provided forgivable loans to small businesses, including child care and preschool providers, to pay their employees during the COVID-19 pandemic. The program ended in May 2021.

Further, the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) is no longer available in Sitka due to the loss of a previous community program sponsor and a low reimbursement rate. This program provides healthy meals and snacks to children and adults receiving child care at low to no cost, based on the number of low-income families served by a provider. As a result, the cost of providing meals and snacks to children in care falls onto providers. The exception to this is Wooch.een Preschool, which is sponsored in the program through the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska (CCTHITA). All but one provider offers meals and/or snacks to the children they serve.

Licensing Process
As part of the Tribal CCDF block grant, providers can receive assistance from STA to work through the licensing process as well as help with covering licensing fees. Outreach has been conducted in recent years to address gaps in available child care services. However, key informants shared that there has been little interest among residents in becoming licensed providers.

Becoming a licensed child care provider is a difficult and costly process. One key informant described it as “grueling” and explained that in addition to extensive paperwork and background checks, there are many fees, including safety and training, licensing, and others. In discussing the significant overhead costs, they explained, “Safety equipment alone can run up into the several hundreds… And then just thinking about materials, educational materials, and toys and all of that - just getting prepared to open.” Some key informants and child care providers also spoke to the heavy workload required to maintain licensing, which can pose a challenge for some.

As a result, there are few licensed child care options in the community, and many families rely on family members or close friends. However, unlicensed family and friends are not able to accept tuition assistance programs or use assistance to cover their operating and/or training
costs. One survey respondent noted this as a challenge for their family, sharing “Child care is super expensive, so we use in-home care, which typically doesn’t qualify for funding because of licensing needs, so it’s all out of pocket.” An individual must become fully licensed if they want to accept assistance programs. Full licensure, however, has significant implications for how services will be provided, including being open to the general public rather than just serving family/friends.

“And what the expectation is, is that person that wants to get licensed has to be open to the public. They can’t just do it for a family member. They have to have their hours posted. They have to have all these policies and procedures that would apply to everyone. And they would have to advertise and be open to anyone that wanted to use their facility.” - Key informant

**CHILD CARE STAFFING**

Individuals who provide care to children play a significant role in a child’s development. As some providers in Sitka noted, this work is physically and mentally demanding. However, these positions often have low wages and few opportunities for career growth, and there is often high turnover among this workforce.

“The amount of physical work, mental work, and paperwork daily can be overwhelming at times. Then add in a pandemic! To keep up with food costs, utilities, and the basics to operate leaves very little left to put towards employees if we’re trying to keep rates low. Many daycare providers cannot afford health care, and I fall into that category. It would be wonderful if there could be a state-funded program for providers that gave them even basic health care. Perhaps more people would want to become a provider - either work in a center or open their own facility.” - Child care provider

Currently, 39 individuals in Sitka are employed in a child care or preschool program. Most have a bachelor’s or master’s degree, while others have some college without a degree. Hourly wages range from $12 to $18 at child care centers and $18 at preschools, with the exception of Wooch.een Preschool, which offers $24-30 an hour. At the state level, the median hourly wage for a child care worker is $14. This is equivalent to $29,120 annually for a full-time employee, or 214% FPL for a single individual. The state median hourly wage for a preschool teacher is $18. This is equal to $37,440 annually for a full-time employee (276% FPL for a single individual). The child care workforce in Alaska is projected to have a low growth rate (3.8%) from 2018 to 2028 with high employment opportunities.
All but two providers in Sitka offer some form of employee benefits, usually in the form of paid time off and/or sick leave, and some also provide free training or bonuses. Many providers said they would like to offer better benefits, as well as higher pay, but that it is not feasible for their business, noting the difficulty in balancing low tuition with livable wages for staff. One provider pointed out that as long as child care remains tuition-based, this will continue to be a challenge. Another noted that while they would like to offer higher wages and better benefits, it would make their staff ineligible for public assistance and/or low-income housing.

COVID-19 has increased the work stress of providers and their staff. However, there are no formal processes for assessing staff mental health, although some have check-ins with staff members. One provider has a relaxation room available to staff, which was in place before the pandemic.

**SEED Registry Participation**

System for Early Education Development (SEED) is a registry of early care and school-age care professionals, as well as professionals in the state’s Infant Learning Program (early intervention) which began in Alaska in 2001. The system works in a ‘career ladder’ that indicates an individual’s professional attainment, ranging from Level 1 (working or learning in the field) to Level 12 (doctorate-level degree in the field). Individuals who register with SEED are eligible for financial assistance for professional training that can help them move up the career ladder. Of the eight providers in Sitka, five (63%) reported that all of their staff are enrolled in the SEED registry.

**Staffing Challenges**

All providers spoke to staffing challenges they face, and most said it is their biggest challenge. Identified causes for this include the small hiring pool in Sitka, the lack of qualified workers interested in the position, and the low wages and minimal benefits they are able to offer, which make child care a less attractive career option. As a result, providers noted decreased capacity, inability to offer full-day care, and lack of one-on-one support to children with special needs. At one child care center, the owner feels unable to retire because there is no one to fill their role. Some also noted that they have had staff leave child care to work for the Sitka School District, which can offer better wages and benefits. For example, one provider lost three staff within the last year who all went to work for the school district.

This challenge is not unique to Sitka. A study conducted by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in 2021 found that four in every five survey respondents from child care centers were facing staffing shortages, and 78% identified low wages as the main obstacle to recruiting employees. In addition, 81% reported that low
wages are the main reason staff leave the field. Another study found similar trends and reports a 10% decline in the child care industry workforce from pre-pandemic levels.\textsuperscript{45}

When discussing how to address this challenge, several providers spoke about the need for financial support from the City of Sitka, with some referencing the child care line item on the City and Borough of Juneau’s budget as an example of how the City could play a role. They noted this funding could be used for child care development and improvement, training, staff wages/benefits, and/or tuition assistance. City support was also mentioned by some key informants when discussing how to improve the child care system in Sitka.

**CHILD CARE QUALITY**

Standards for quality in a child care system help define expectations and provide a system by which to measure the services of programs. A well-functioning system provides oversight and support to ensure that standards exist, are aligned, and are in use to promote best practices.

In Alaska, Learn & Grow is a quality recognition and improvement system (QRIS) for the state’s child care system, introduced in 2016.\textsuperscript{46} The purpose of this system is to help licensed child care providers improve their quality of care by providing resources and training opportunities focused on high-quality activities. This includes positive teacher-child interactions, use of age-appropriate curricula and activities, development of teacher skills, and creation of nurturing learning environments. The Learn & Grow system is based on four components: (1) administration and leadership, (2) staff qualifications and professional development, (3) relationships and learning environments, and (4) family engagement. The system measures providers based on five levels of quality, from Level 1 (learning about higher quality) to Level 5 (thriving in higher quality).

Only one child care provider in Sitka, Betty Eliason Child Care Center, is currently enrolled in Learn & Grow, though the Ventures Program is in the process of enrolling. Three providers noted they have participated in the past, prior to COVID-19, but were not currently. One of these providers shared that during COVID-19, they’ve been “just trying to get through the day,” while another cited high staff turnover. The provider who is enrolled is currently at Level 1 and explained, “There’s no real incentive to do anything above that.” Two providers were unfamiliar with the system.

However, as noted above, the limited hiring pool in Sitka results in less focus on quality and more on filling positions to keep centers running. As one key informant described, “they’re forced into a position where they were just having to accept a warm body, more or less.”

**CULTURAL PROGRAMMING**

All providers in Sitka incorporate Alaska Native culture into their program to some degree, although it varies from one provider to another. Most use Alaska Native children’s books
provided by STA and the Sealaska Heritage Institute, and some also use toys and other materials provided by STA. Some providers incorporate more extensive cultural programming such as hosting culture bearers such as Alaska Native storytellers, musicians, and artists and/or basing learning and activities around local events and seasonal cycles. For the most part, hosting culture bearers has been on pause since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While most providers recognize the value of incorporating culturally based programming into their services, some are hesitant because they are not Alaska Native themselves and feel that it is not their place to teach a culture that is not their own. All providers expressed interest in increasing their cultural programming in the future. This suggests an opportunity for STA to increase partnership with providers to offer support, such as hosting cultural instructors to engage with children in activities that teach and celebrate Tlingit culture, and/or cultural consultants to support providers on culturally relevant activities.

There may also be opportunities for sharing ideas, information, and resources among providers to support one another in this area. For example, Wooch.een Preschool designed and implements a curriculum map that meets the educational requirements of the Head Start program while also incorporating place-based learning, which can be a valuable resource for others to learn from and incorporate into their own services. Prior to COVID-19, there were plans in place for the Wooch.een Preschool teacher to visit other preschool and child care facilities and assist them in expanding cultural programming. However, this did not occur due to the pandemic.

About two-thirds of key informants, when speaking about their ideal child care system in Sitka, also spoke of the importance of incorporating cultural components and/or place-based learning, citing the value to all children to increase understanding and sense of connection to the community and environment they live in. One individual explained, “it gives any student, Tlingit or not, an idea of where we’re at and the history of what’s going on here, and how to live off of the land, all things that anybody can benefit from.” Some also spoke to the importance of cultural programming to support Alaska Native children in particular and help them learn about their culture and heritage and to serve them in a way that best meets their needs and supports their development.

“Just being sensitive to the fact that [Alaska Native] children are coming from this historical trauma that has been brought down through our DNA still to this day... We need to be more concerned about, okay, this child isn’t learning the same way as their non-Native counterpart. What can we better do to show this client or
EFFORTS TO ADDRESS CHILD CARE NEEDS

Within Sitka, there are some efforts to address child care needs in the community. As some interview participants noted, some of the efforts have been discussed for several years without much headway to implementation, suggesting that there are significant barriers to creating sustainable change in the local child care system. Below are descriptions of local efforts that were identified by key informants and large employers.

SITKA EARLY CHILDHOOD COALITION

In 2018, the Sitka Early Childhood Coalition was initiated through a five-year Supporting Transitions and Educational Promise Southeast Alaska (STEPS) grant received by the Sitka School District. This grant focused on education from cradle to career, with a specific early childhood project component. One of the activities of the Sitka Early Childhood Coalition was hosting community cafés in which residents discussed child care challenges and needs. The two biggest needs identified were availability and affordability, which mirrors the findings of this report. Due to the pandemic, as well as the grant manager leaving their position, this coalition was on pause for roughly two years. However, it restarted in February 2022.

CHILD CARE CO-OP

Several key informants shared that there are some families in the community exploring the development of a child care co-operative to help meet their needs. One person shared that the Sitka Early Childhood Coalition has also reached out to these individuals to offer support, although it is unclear what the status of this partnership is. While this is still in the early stages of exploration, a few key informants are optimistic about this approach. However, one key informant noted that child care co-ops have been attempted in the past without much success, although the reasons as to why are unknown.

This arrangement would likely be an unlicensed co-op, as obtaining licensing for multiple families’ homes would be particularly difficult and costly. As an effect, these families would not be eligible to accept CCAP tuition assistance or funding for quality improvement, which covers a variety of expenses from staff wages and professional development to supplies and equipment. Participating families would also have to be able to provide care on a rotating basis, which brings consideration of work and scheduling.
EMPLOYER SUPPORT
Many employers offer flexible work hours or work-from-home, when possible, which is largely in response to COVID-19 impacts. All interviewed employers expressed interest in potential partnership with STA to address the child care needs of their employees and the broader community.

Two large employers (Hames Corp. and STA) noted interest in operating a child care facility. For Hames Corp., their interest is in first offering this service to their employees, with the potential to expand to the community at some point. The individual from STA mentioned they would like to offer sliding scale tuition. However, they cited significant challenges in doing so. The biggest hurdles that were discussed include the lack of a qualified workforce in the community as well as the high cost to create and sustain a center.
FAMILY CHILD CARE EXPERIENCES AND NEEDS

Families in Sitka shared their experiences and needs via a survey, and information was also shared by key informants and employers in the community. **Overall, families need more child care availability, as well as lower costs for care.** COVID-19 has exacerbated existing challenges.

While the previous section focused on the current state of Sitka’s child care system, this section examines families' experiences in this system, including barriers and priorities. It proceeds in three subsections:

- Child Care Priorities
- Child Care Challenges
- COVID-19 Impacts

CHILD CARE PRIORITIES

When selecting a child care provider, families each have their own priorities and preferences. Among survey respondents who have Alaska Native/American Indian children, safety, quality of both staff and facility, reliability, and cost were among the most important considerations when selecting a child care provider. Further, around half want care during regular business hours, and just under one-third want care outside of regular business hours. **Survey respondents with Alaska Native/American Indian children were more than twice as likely as their peers to report that being open outside of regular business hours is one of the most important factors in selecting child care.** Among these respondents, those with children ages 6-12 were more than four times as likely as their peers to report this.

Those who cited “other” considerations mentioned comfort and familiarity with the provider and their staff, sufficient attention to one’s child, and slightly extended hours for those who work regular business hours. Those with children ages 0-5 were more likely to report the reliability of care as being important, and slightly more likely to report considerations of safety, quality of the facility, and cost. Respondents with children ages 6-12 were slightly more likely to report a preference for a provider that is convenient to work and home and that has culturally appropriate programming.
CHILD CARE FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Accommodations for children with special needs was reported by almost one-fifth of respondents in both groups. However, survey respondents with Alaska Native/American Indian children ages 0-5 were twice as likely as their peers to cite accommodations for special needs as among the most important considerations for child care. There was less of a difference between these groups for children ages 6-12. Children ages 6-12 may be more likely to be identified as having a special need upon entering the school system, which could account for this difference. (See page 21 for system-wide discussion.)
CHILD CARE CHALLENGES

In Sitka, families face many challenges in accessing the child care they want, and many have had to find alternative supports to meet their needs. The high cost of care and limited availability are the most common challenges families face. Those with young children (ages 0-5) have a greater challenge finding available child care options. One survey respondent shared the impacts of the lack of infant care on their family, stating:

“We’ve been on the waitlist since my second trimester of pregnancy, and my kid is one year [and] two months old. Available spots are the biggest barrier. My kid is being watched only by myself, my spouse, and one grandparent, and that sucks on all our schedules.”

As noted above on page 18 (Figure 17) more than half (59%) of survey respondents said difficulty finding child care makes it hard to raise children in Sitka, the second most commonly reported challenge. **Those who have Alaska Native/American Indian children were less likely than their peers to report this challenge.** According to some key informants, Alaska Native families are more likely to prefer/use family and friends to help provide child care, which may help explain this difference. However, still more than half of respondents with Alaska Native/American Indian children reported this as a difficulty in raising children in Sitka. (See page 19 for extended discussion of limited capacity.)

Between the two age groups, respondents with children in the 0-5 age group were more likely than those with children in the 6-12 age group to say ‘finding child care’ is one of the things that made raising children in Sitka difficult. When comparing respondents with Alaska Native/American Indian children and their peers within each age group, this trend remains consistent.
WORK AND CHILD CARE SCHEDULES

Many survey respondents shared that lack of child care has been a barrier for themself or someone in their household getting or keeping a job at some point. This was true for almost two-thirds (63%) of respondents with children ages 0-5 and 45% of those with children ages 6-12. There was no difference between those with Alaska Native/American Indian children and their peers. This has impacts on both the families who need child care and the broader workforce and hiring pool in Sitka.

To address this challenge, some parents/caregivers rely on family, have one partner stay home, and/or have missed work due to lack of care. Many survey respondents noted that COVID-19 has exacerbated this challenge. Several survey respondents illustrated the impacts of a lack of child care on their ability to work:

» “I have swing hours, and it’s hard for me.”
» “I was offered a remote position but had to turn it down because of lack of reliable child care. It is impossible to work full-time from home with [toddlers] in the house.”
» “I was able to keep my job, but we had to fly family to town to take care of our kid.”
» “My spouse is stepping down from a full-time job with benefits to try and work part-time because of the lack of child care... It makes me think having a second kid might not be in the cards.”
» “We are primarily relying on one grandparent, which we feel is overtaxing her. Our only child also has no opportunity to socialize with other infants.”

During interviews, large employers explained that the lack of child care results in many employees requesting flexible schedules and/or leaves of absence, and one mentioned they have lost staff due to a lack of available child care options. Lack of child care also impacts their ability to hire new staff. Intermittent child care closures due to COVID-19 increased employees’ need for flexibility in work schedules.
BARRIERS TO PREFERRED CARE

Among all survey respondents, about four in ten respondents would prefer a different form of child care than what they are currently using. There was very little difference between respondents with Alaska Native/American Indian children and their peers, as well as between the two age groups.

Of those who would prefer a different form of child care, there are multiple barriers they face to accessing it. The high cost of care was the most common barrier reported by respondents with Alaska Native/American Indian children for both age groups. In addition, around one-quarter of respondents with children in both age groups noted they or their partner/spouse cannot afford to stay home. (See page 21 for system-wide discussion.)

The high cost of child care affects low-income families the most. Some key informants pointed out that with the generally high cost of living in Sitka, the additional cost of child care is often unrealistic. As one individual shared:

“I've had a few employees leave because child care is more expensive than what they’re making, or it evens out to about the same… And so would I rather stay home and spend that time with my child than work and just kind of make it be a wash?”

Due to COVID-19 business closures, many families’ economic stress increased significantly, particularly those whose jobs cannot be done in a work-from-home environment. As a result, these families are further limited in their ability to cover the cost of child care if they are able to get an open spot. One key informant reflected, “I don’t know how single parents do it.” Some key informants also shared that many families are just above assistance program income-eligibility levels and must manage their child care without these support options.

In relation to other barriers, almost all respondents with Alaska Native/American Indian children ages 0-5 said that the waitlist is too long/there are no openings. As noted above in Table 2, infant care in particular is extremely limited in the community. However, of these respondents who noted a lack of openings and/or a long waitlist, only 24% (N=5) have an infant. Respondents with Alaska Native/American Indian children ages 6-12 were more likely than those with children ages 0-5 to report that their preferred form of care doesn’t fit their schedule.

“I just wish there were options for parents who are unable to get their child into licensed daycares.” - Survey respondent with a child age 0-5
Other noted barriers include COVID-19 concerns and site closures, and children not feeling comfortable with staff and/or welcome. One respondent with a child in the 6-12 age group noted that most programs in the community are, “geared towards younger children.”

Since the pandemic began in March 2020, many families have faced significant challenges related to child care due to providers closing their facilities, increased safety concerns, and reduced capacity when facilities are open.

Among survey respondents with Alaska Native/American Indian children, one-fifth of those with children ages 0-5 and one-quarter of those with children ages 6-12 report COVID-19 impacts on their child care needs. For those with children ages 0-5, four in ten reported that they have a harder time covering the costs of child care. Although reported less frequently, roughly one-quarter (23%) of those with children ages 6-12 also reported this impact. Between one-quarter and one-third of respondents reported most of the other listed impacts as well.

Other reported impacts include difficulty maintaining work for self and/or spouse, relying on family for care, and children out of school more frequently for illnesses such as the common cold.
COVID-19 increased child care challenges for families with AN/AI children, particularly in terms of cost.

- It is harder to cover costs of child care: 40%
- I worry about my child's health and safety at child care: 29%
- I prefer to keep my child at home: 29%
- I had to quit my job or reduce work hours to care for my child: 29%
- My primary form of child care closed down: 28%
- My child was put on a waitlist: 23%
- Other(s): 11%
- N/A - It did not affect: 23%

AN/AI children ages 0-5  |  AN/AI children ages 6-12
---|---
40%|31%
29%|27%
29%|29%
29%|28%
28%|28%
11%|23%
4%|0%
19%|28%

N = 52; 65
CONCLUSION

While there are many nuanced findings explored in this report, the takeaway is clear: The primary child care challenge in Sitka is insufficient capacity. While this issue existed prior to the pandemic, it has been greatly exacerbated by COVID-19. As of this report, actual capacity of licensed providers hovers around just 50% of licensed capacity. Infant care is even more limited, and care for children with special needs is also difficult to find.

The most reported factor for limited capacity is child care providers’ difficulty recruiting and retaining staff, heightened since the onset of the pandemic. There are several reasons for this, including primarily a lack of competitive employee wages and benefits. Intermittent closures as well as reduced enrollment have placed additional financial burdens on providers, further contributing to difficulties retaining staff. Without sufficient staff, the number of children a provider can care for is limited. Additionally, no licensed providers currently offer any care outside of regular business hours such as evening or weekend care, a barrier for twice as many respondents with Alaska Native/American Indian children as their peers.

Additional barriers to sufficient capacity also exist. Multiple providers cited insufficient facility size as a barrier to offering additional child care slots, full-week and/or summer care. Individuals interested in becoming licensed face a daunting and costly process. Families who can secure licensed care are faced with high costs. While high costs of care are not unique to Sitka, the cost is 16% higher in Sitka than the average statewide rate.47

SITKA IS NOT ALONE

None of these challenges exist in isolation of one another; they are all interconnected. Similarly, while every community is unique, Sitka is not alone in its child care crisis. Many other communities across the state and nation are facing similar challenges, and efforts to find and implement solutions abound. These challenges existed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic but have been exacerbated by it. Workforce issues in particular are drawing attention to the challenge providers have long faced in paying a living wage while maintaining an affordable level of services for families. Another recent needs assessment found that 22% of Alaska households raising a child under five would like to enter the workforce or increase their work hours but are unable to due to limited child care.48 Additionally, the report cites research ranking Alaska as 28th out of the 50 states for its level of state-level coordination.

Encouragingly, efforts to address Alaska’s crisis do exist. As of this report, House Bill 149, which would allow child care providers to unionize, is currently in Alaska’s legislature. There are also additional statewide efforts to fund pre-kindergarten and early learning programs, give tribes and local governments a greater voice, and increase coordination between early
childhood programs. Further, Alaska’s Child Care Program Office (CCPO) has also received significant stimulus funding through federal COVID-19 relief acts to help stabilize child care providers.

However, Alaska lacks a clear, unified effort in its solutions to the child care crisis. For example, Early Childhood Alaska: A Strategic Direction for 2020-2025 plan created by the Early Childhood Alaska Joint Task Force Leadership Team outlines a bold vision for a strong and equitable early childhood system and ideas to address many of the challenges noted in this report- a crucial first step - but the plan exists separately from any identified organizational leader for its implementation. Instead, communities within the state must each take their own approach.

**OPPORTUNITIES FOR LOCAL PARTNERSHIP**

In addition to state-level efforts, many potential partners at the local level are already working to address the child care crisis in Sitka. The Sitka Early Childhood Coalition, temporarily paused during COVID-19, has been working to increase capacity for years. CCTHITA provides local Alaska Native families with additional child care support through their own Tribal CCDF funding and has expressed interest in potential partnership with STA. Additionally, all local employers interviewed for this needs assessment expressed interest in working with STA to address the crisis. The City of Sitka is also looking for solutions and has directed the Health and Human Services Committee to make recommendations. Each of these organizations is a potential partner for STA to collaborate with in addressing Sitka’s child care crisis.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

This is an unprecedented time. While short-term solutions are required to address the immediate child care crisis, longer-term systemic approaches, including advocacy and innovate solutions, are equally important. The following recommendations explore both short-term and long-term horizons.

**RECOMMENDATION I:** Provide supplemental funding for wages to help existing providers increase capacity

As highlighted in this needs assessment, the greatest immediate need for families in Sitka is increased capacity in the child care system. Current providers are not operating at their licensed capacity, primarily due to staffing shortages and to a smaller degree space constraints. STA is able to provide supplemental, short-term funding to child care providers to support their operations and supplement staff wages. These include but not are limited to providing grants to providers for supplemental wages to attract and retain staff, as well as to provide hiring bonuses and offer paid professional development.
RECOMMENDATION II: Ensure increased capacity, both short-term and long-term, addresses specific needs of tribal families

Currently, many of STA’s CCDF-related decisions are closely correlated with the state’s approach. However, this needs assessment highlights unique needs faced by Alaska Native families in Sitka. As such, any efforts to increase capacity, as well as existing capacity, should ensure these needs are addressed, including:

» Evening / weekend care to accommodate families working non-traditional hours
» Sufficient staff training and resources to ensure high-quality care to children with special needs
» Culturally appropriate programming

RECOMMENDATION III: Develop an early childhood education advocacy agenda

The COVID-19 pandemic has put a spotlight on long-simmering equity issues that influence families access to care, and the sustainability of the providers who offer child care services. While the supplemental funds can provide short-term relief, fostering long-term, systemic change requires a voice at the table. Developing an advocacy agenda to ensure STA is a participant in local, state, and federal conversations regarding child care would increase the likelihood that proposed solutions will also meet the needs of tribal children and families, and any short-term capacity gains can be sustained once supplemental funding has run out.

RECOMMENDATION IV: Consider a child care center partnership with other large employers to subsidize costs and increase community-wide capacity

While traditional approaches such as stipends for professional development and wage supplements are useful for addressing immediate concerns, standard solutions have failed to solve the child care crisis. As such, it is valuable to consider more innovative solutions. One approach may be to foster partnerships with other large, local employers to develop a child care center. Shared costs and administrative duties would ease the burden on any one organization, while simultaneously increasing community-wide capacity and potentially enabling higher wages and/or benefits to staff members. There is significant interest in this approach from other large employers in Sitka.

3 State of Alaska, Department of Labor and Workforce Development. (2021). Alaska Population by Age, Sex and
3 Ibid.
9 State of Alaska, Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Public Assistance. (2017-2021). [Data file]. Received via data request.
16 Gail Trujillo, Program Coordinator at Sitka, AK Early Learning Program. February 1, 2022. [Personal communication].


42 Ibid.


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 Sitka community members through the online survey platform Survey Monkey and in-person through local service organizations in November 2021. The purpose of this survey was to understand parents’ and caregivers’ child care needs and experiences. It was available in English, Spanish, and Tagalog. However, no responses were received for the Spanish and Tagalog versions. Survey respondents were offered the opportunity to enter a raffle to win one of five gift cards worth $100 to AC Lakeside grocery store.

The English survey received 143 responses. Of the respondents, 132 were eligible respondents (92%), meaning they live in Sitka and care for at least one child under the age of 13. Just over one-quarter (27%) of eligible respondents had children in both the 0-5 and 6-12 age groups. Survey data was exported from Survey Monkey and analyzed using Microsoft Excel using descriptive statistics. Open-ended comments were thematically analyzed in Microsoft Excel.

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 in “child care cost high”, this was considered as equivalent to selecting the pre-listed option and was counted and analyzed as such. In these instances, the total number of open-ended responses to that question remained unaltered. A copy of the community survey is included in Appendix B.

INTERVIEWS

Interviews were conducted with three distinct groups: child care providers, key informants, and employers identified by STA. Interviews were conducted between October 2021 and January 2022 via Zoom, telephone, and written correspondence. When relevant, interview recordings were transcribed and analyzed for themes in the qualitative analysis software Dedoose. All interview guides can be found in Appendix C.

All eight licensed child care and preschool providers were interviewed to gather detailed insight about services offered and their experience as early care and education providers. Interviewed providers include:

» 3 to 5 Preschool – Jo Ingman
A total of 11 key informants from a variety of local family services organizations were interviewed to understand their experience working with families in Sitka and their perspective on families’ child care needs and challenges. To maintain confidentiality, participants are not identified.

Finally, seven key employers identified by STA were asked about each of their company’s experiences with employees’ child care needs and supports. While most employers interviewed were considered relatively large in terms of the workforce for Sitka, select smaller organizations were also identified and interviewed. Interviewed employers include:

- Alaska Longline Fishermen’s Association - Laurina Marcello
- Hames Corporation - Jaylene Owen
- Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium (SEARHC) - Breanna Erickson
- Sitka School District - Chris Voron
- Sitka Tribe of Alaska - Anne Davis
- True Value - Amanda Martin
- United States Coast Guard, Air Station Sitka - Commander Adam Young

**DOCUMENT & DATA REVIEW**

The Stellar Group reviewed CCDF Block Grant and CCAP documents and past reports on Sitka child care provided by STA to provide historical and current context on the use of funds and program requirements. In addition, 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 Sitka 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. Further, data specific to Alaska Native children and families was not available for all data points explored. Additionally, information from the Childhood Understanding Behaviors Survey (CUBS), a survey of mothers of three-year-olds to understand the health and early childhood experiences of young children in Alaska, was only available at the State, public health region, and behavioral health region levels due to the small sample size within Sitka.

**FOCUS GROUP**
To inform the service planning component of this report, community survey findings were analyzed to identify any specific groups whom it may be beneficial to solicit further information from. To this end, Stellar Group organized and advertised a focus group with parents/caregivers who work non-traditional hours (i.e., outside of Monday-Friday business hours) with a current child care need for an Alaska Native child under the age of 13. This focus group was conducted via Zoom on March 7, 2022 and included a total of four participants. The focus group was transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis in Dedoose software program. Participants were each compensated with a $100 Amazon gift card for their time. To maintain confidentiality, participants are not identified.
APPENDIX B: COMMUNITY SURVEY

The Sitka Tribe of Alaska is interested in hearing from families about their child care needs and experiences. This survey is intended for families living in Sitka with Alaska Native/American Indian children in their home age 12 or younger.

As a thank you for completing this survey, you may choose to enter a raffle to win 1 of 5 gift cards worth $100 to AC Lakeside grocery store 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 not be linked to your name. 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.

Please tell us a little about yourself and your family, and your experience raising children in Sitka. This section also includes questions about your participation in family events and programs in the community.

1. Do you currently live in Sitka?
   o Yes
   o No (You are ineligible to take this survey. Thank you for your time!)

2. Are you or a partner currently pregnant and/or do you have any children age 12 or younger living with you?
   o Yes
   o No (You are ineligible to take this survey. Thank you for your time!)
   
   If yes, please list their ages:_______________________________________________________

3. Do any of the children in your home identify as Alaska Native/American Indian?
   o Yes
   o No

4. What are the best things about raising children in Sitka? 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

5. What makes raising children in Sitka 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

6. 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

   Please provide any additional information about your response: _______________________

7. Do you and the child(ren) in your home currently participate in any of these activities?
   Check all that you have been to.
   - Babies & Books
   - Sitka Sprouts
   - Center for Community - Part C play group
   - Wooch.een Play Group
   - Story time at the public library
   - Hames Center Family Fun Time
   - Sitka Tribe Open Gym
   - Sitka Tribe Cultural Family Fun Days
   - Open swim at the pool
   Other(s), please describe:______________________________________________________
None of the above

8. Are any children in your home currently participating in these programs? Check all that apply.
   - Baby Raven Reads
9. Where do you get information about family events and activities? Check all that apply.
   - Facebook
   - Instagram
   - Twitter
   - Radio
   - Newspaper
   - Tribal newsletter
   - Bulletin boards
   - School newsletter
   - Other, please describe: ______________________________________________________
   - N/A - I don't get information about family events and activities

10. 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
   - I had scheduling conflicts
   - I don't have transportation
   - I wasn't interested
   - I had COVID-19 related concerns
   - Other, please describe: _____________________________________________________
   - N/A - I do not face any barriers to attending

Please tell us about the type(s) of child care you currently use for the children in your home, and your experiences with them. This can include babysitters, daycare, preschool, and Head Start programs.

Section A: Young children age 5 and younger who are not yet enrolled in kindergarten.

11. Do you currently have any children age 5 or younger in your home?
    - Yes
    - No (if no, please skip to question 17)

12. What are the most important factors to you when selected child care for the child(ren) age 5 or younger in your home? Check all that apply.
    - Quality of the facility
    - Experience/training of the caregivers
Safety of environment
Culturally appropriate programming
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
Reliability of care
Accommodations for children with special needs
Other, please describe: ________________________________________________________
N/A - I do not use child care for the child(ren) age 5 or younger in my home

13. Has a lack of child care for the child(ren) age 5 or younger in your home ever been a barrier for you or someone in your household getting or keeping a job?
   o Yes
   o No

If yes, please share any comments about your response: ________________________________

14. Would you prefer a different form of child care for the child(ren) age 5 or younger in your home than what you are currently using?
   o Yes
   o No (if no, please skip to question 16)

If yes, please tell us why:____________________________________________________________

15. What barriers keep you from accessing your preferred form of child care for the young children in your home? Check all that apply.
   o It doesn’t fit my schedule
   o It’s too expensive
   o I or my spouse/partner can’t afford to stay home
   o Transportation to child care is a challenge
   o The wait list too long / there’s no openings
   o It does not accommodate children with special needs
   o Other, please describe: ________________________________________________________

16. How has COVID-19 impacted your child care needs for the child(ren) age 5 or younger in your home? Check all that apply.
   o My primary form of child care closed down
   o It is harder to cover costs of child care
   o My child was put on a waitlist
   o I worry about my child’s health and safety at child care
   o I prefer to keep my child at home
   o I had to quit my job or reduce work hours to care for my child
   o Other, please describe: ________________________________________________________
   o N/A - COVID-19 has not impacted my child care
Section B: School-age children (6-12 years).

17. Do you currently have any children ages 6-12 in your home?
   - Yes
   - No (if no, please skip to question 23)

18. What are the most important factors to you when selected child care for the child(ren) age 6-12 in your home? Check all that apply.
   - Quality of the facility
   - Experience/training of the caregivers
   - Safety of environment
   - Culturally appropriate programming
   - 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
   - Reliability of care
   - Accommodations for children with special needs
   - Other, please describe: ____________________________________________________
   - N/A - I do not use child care for the child(ren) age 6-12 in my home

19. Has a lack of child care for the child(ren) age 6-12 in your home ever been a barrier for you or someone in your household to getting or keeping a job?
   - Yes
   - No
   If yes, please share any comments about your response: _____________________________

20. Would you prefer a different form of child care or before/after school programming for the child(ren) age 6-12 in your home?
   - Yes
   - No (if no, please skip to question 22)
   If yes, please tell us why:___________________________________________________________

21. What barriers keep you from accessing your preferred form of child care or before/after school programming? Check all that apply.
   - It doesn’t fit my schedule
   - It’s too expensive
   - I or my spouse/partner can’t afford to stay home
22. How has COVID-19 impacted your child care needs for the child(ren) age 5-12 in your home? Check all that apply.
- My primary form of child care closed down
- It is harder to cover costs of child care
- My child was put on a waitlist
- I worry about my child’s health and safety at child care
- I prefer to keep my child at home
- I had to quit my job or reduce work hours to care for my child
- Other, please describe: __________________________________________
- N/A - COVID-19 has not impacted my child care

Please share any comments about your response: ___________________________________

Section C: Child Care Assistance Programs

Through Sitka Tribe’s Child Care Assistance Program, tribal citizens can receive funding from the Sitka Tribe of Alaska to cover most or all of the cost of child care. Please tell us about your familiarity and experience with this program.

23. Have you ever heard of the Sitka Tribe’s Child Care Assistance Program?
   - Yes
   - No (if no, please skip to question 25)

24. How did you hear about the Sitka Tribe’s Child Care Assistance Program?
   - Friend or family member
   - My employer
   - Child care provider
   - Social service office (WIC, SNAP, TANF, OCS, etc.)
   - A healthcare or mental health care provider
   - Sitkans Against Family Violence
   - My child’s school
   - STA website
   - Online search
   - Other, please describe: __________________________________________

25. Do you know if you are eligible for the Sitka Tribe’s Child Care Assistance Program?
   - Yes, I know I am eligible
   - Yes, I know I am not eligible
   - No, I’m not sure if I am eligible or not
26. Do you currently receive benefits from either of the following child care assistance programs? Check all that apply.
   □ State of Alaska Child Care Assistance Program
   □ Sitka Tribe Child Care Assistance Program
   □ I do not receive assistance from either of these programs

27. How would you rate your experience applying for assistance from the Sitka Tribe’s Child Care Assistance Program?
   o Excellent
   o Good
   o Fair
   o Poor
   o N/A - I have not applied for assistance through this program

Please share any comments about your response: _______________________________________

28. How could the Sitka Tribe Child Care Assistance Program improve its services to families?
   [open comment]

29. Please share any other thoughts or comments about your experience with child care in Sitka, or with the Sitka Tribe Child Care Assistance Program.
   [open comment]

30. As a thank you for your participation in this survey, you may enter a raffle to win 1 of 5 gift cards worth $100 to AC Lakeside grocery store. If you would like to enter this raffle, please provide your full name and mailing address.

   Name: ___________________________________________________________________________

   Mailing address:_________________________________________________________________

31. Would you be interested in participating in an online focus group for further discussion of early childhood education in Sitka? Participants will be compensated $100 for their time. If yes, please provide your full name, phone number, and email address.

   Name: ________________________________________________________________________

   Phone number: __________________________________________________________________

   Mailing address:_________________________________________________________________

Thank you!
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDES

CHILD CARE/PRESCHOOL PROVIDER INTERVIEW GUIDE

Due to the nature of this assessment, confidentiality is not guaranteed.

Background information

1. For the record, can you please state your name and the organization you work for?
   a. What is your role in the organization?
   b. How long have you worked at the organization?
   c. Have you had any other roles in early childhood prior to your current role?
2. Are you, or anyone in your family, enrolled as Tribal citizens?

Tell me a little bit about your facility/program:

3. Are there any specific curriculums / models that you follow at your facility/program?
4. Do you offer a Pre-K program?
5. Do you offer before /after-school care for school-aged children?
6. Are you able to serve children with special health care needs? (i.e., physical or mental disabilities)
7. Do you offer meals to the children in your care?
   a. Are you currently enrolled in the Child & Adult Care Food Program (CACFP?)
8. What is your current capacity for each age?
   a. Are you currently operating at capacity?
   b. Do you have a waitlist? How many families are on it?
   c. What is the staff/child ratio at each age?
9. What hours/ days are you open?
   a. Do you offer part-time options?
   b. Overnight care?
   c. What about drop-in?
10. Do you offer any culturally responsive programming in your center?
   a. If yes, please describe.
   b. If no, would you be interested in doing so in the future?
11. How many staff do you have at your facility/program?
    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?
12. Do you participate in Learn & Grow?
    a. If yes, what level are you at?
    b. If no, why not?
13. What are the biggest challenges you face operating a child care center in Sitka?
a. What would make it easier?
b. Do you have any plans to change or expand the services you offer in the community?

The next few questions are about COVID-19 impacts.

14. Has COVID-19 impacted your operations?
   a. If yes, please describe how.
   b. Is your facility financially stable?
15. Was your facility able to access any COVID-19 child care relief funds or other federal assistance?
   a. Did you receive additional grants for health and safety supplies?
16. Has your facility taken any deliberate actions to help address staff mental health concerns related to COVID-19?
   a. What about children’s COVID-19-related mental health concerns?

I have a few more questions about your rates and any assistance programs you or your families participate in.

17. What are your rates (for each age)?
   a. Do you offer any discounts?
   b. Do you offer ParEx, CCAP, siblings rates, full-time / part-time?
18. Approximately what percentage of the families you serve receive CCAP / Tribal CCAP?
   a. What is your experience with accepting State of Alaska CCAP?
   b. What is your experience with accepting Tribal CCAP?
   c. Are you aware of any difficulties that families face with these funds?
19. Have you received any other form of Tribal CCAP assistance within your facility?
   a. For supplies, equipment, or staff professional development?

I have a couple final questions about child care in Sitka more generally.

20. In your opinion, what would an ideal early childhood education system in Sitka look like?
21. What would be needed to make your vision closer to a reality?
22. Is there anything I haven’t asked you about that you would like to share now in regard to Sitka’s early childhood education system and the needs of families?

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE

Your responses will remain anonymous and confidential. This interview is expected to take no more than 45 minutes.

Background information

1. For the record, can you please state your name and the organization you work for?
2. Are you, or anyone in your family, enrolled as tribal citizens?
3. Please describe your organization and your role within the organization.
   a. How long have you worked for your organization?

I’d first like to ask you about the current state of child care in Sitka and families’ experiences.

4. How well do you feel the child care needs of families in Sitka are being met?
   a. Tribal families specifically?

5. Are you aware of any early learning programs that have a specific focus on culturally appropriate programming?
   a. What about in child care settings?
   b. If yes, where? If not, why don’t you think this exists?

6. What barriers and/or challenges are faced by families in obtaining adequate, affordable child care?

7. How has COVID-19 impacted families’ access to child care?

8. In what ways, if any, do you feel the child care experiences of Tribal families may differ from non-Tribal families? Please explain.
   a. Do you think Tribal families face different barriers and/or challenges to adequate, affordable child care than non-Tribal families?
      i. Why do you think that is?

The next few questions about improving child care and the early childhood education system in Sitka.

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 early childhood education system in Sitka look like?

11. What would be needed to make your vision closer to a reality?

12. What can the community and/or Sitka Tribe of Alaska do to better meet the child care needs of families with young children? (Probe: help potential providers with licensing, staff incentives, should there be a high school career prep program, etc.?)

Closing

13. Is there anything I haven’t asked you about that you would like to share now in regard to Sitka’s early childhood education system and the needs of families?

EMPLOYER INTERVIEW GUIDE

Due to the nature of this assessment, confidentiality is not guaranteed.

Background information

1. For the record, can you please state your name?
2. Are you, or anyone in your family, enrolled as Tribal citizens?
3. Can you please describe your company and your role in the company?
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 are about your company’s workforce.

4. Roughly how many people do you employ in the community?
5. What is the approximate percentage of full-time employees?
6. How common are shifts outside of normal business hours?
7. Is any of your workforce employed with you on a seasonal basis?
8. These next couple questions ask about your employees and your sense of child care needs. How aware do you feel you are of your employees’ child care use and needs?
   a. If high awareness, please expand on this.
   b. What specific challenges do your employees face with regards to child care?
9. Do you feel that your employees’ child care needs have an effect on regards to your business, in terms of employee availability, retention, or any other areas?
   a. If yes, please explain.
   b. Do child care needs of potential employees effect your company’s hiring?
10. COVID-19 has affected everyone in different ways.
    a. Have COVID-related child care concerns come up as a challenge to either hiring or retention at your company?
    b. In what other ways have you noticed COVID-19 affecting your employees in relation to child care? For example, are you aware of any employees who have had to reduce hours or leave their positions due to a COVID-19 related increase in difficulty finding affordable child care?
11. There are a lot of different ways employers can aide 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. Has your company explored any of these options in the past or currently?
    a. If yes, which ways have you explored?
       i. Are you currently offering any aide for child care?
       ii. Did you offer child care aide in the past?
       iii. If you were previously offering any but no longer are, what caused you to stop?
    b. If no, are there any reasons your company chose not to or is unable to explore any options?
12. If supports were available, would your company consider introducing or expanding any of the ways you aide your employees in securing affordable child care?
    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?
13. Would you like to have identifying information shared with STA so they can potentially reach out to you regarding child care-related funding?
14. From your perspective as a community leader, how well are families in Sitka able to meet their child care needs?
   a. What suggestions or ideas do you have to address those needs?

15. Is there anything else regarding child care and your business or employees that I haven’t asked about that you’d like to share?
APPENDIX D: COMMUNITY MEMBERS’ SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Survey respondents receive information about programs and activities in a variety of ways. This information is useful for understanding effective methods of promotion and connection with members of the community. Facebook is the most common source of information, followed by the newspaper. Additionally, roughly one-third of all respondents receive information from the school newsletter and/or the radio. Among those who shared a different source of information than those listed, respondents named email, word of mouth, and the KCAW radio station calendar. Twenty-one percent of respondents with Alaska Native/American Indian children receive information on programs/activities from the STA tribal newsletter.

Just 5% of all respondents do not receive information about family programs or activities. This suggests that while respondents have access to some information about community events, the channels they use do not provide them with all the information they need, based on feedback explored about showing many are not aware of many of the programs and activities for children in the community.

![Facebook is the most common avenue for receiving information about programs and activities.](image)