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In a state full of resources, we sometimes forget that our most precious and valuable resource is in homes across Alaska—our children. Alaska’s growth and prosperity is deeply connected to the health and productivity of our children, families, and the communities in which they live. Alaska is home to 187,300 children, and while many of them are thriving, there are just as many who are not.

All families—no matter their education level, economic status, family structure, or where they live—can raise children who thrive. Unfortunately, many of our hard-working Alaskan families are struggling, faced with challenges that prevent them from becoming, and remaining, physically, mentally, and economically self-sufficient.

As a state, we all have a responsibility to ensure our children and families live in safe, stable, and nurturing environments. One of the ways we can ensure we achieve this goal is by allowing data to help tell the story of how we can eliminate the challenges that prevent our families from raising thriving children.

Alaska Children’s Trust (ACT) embraces the belief that all Alaskans have a responsibility to support our children and families, and has adopted a framework that provides the architectural structure Alaska needs to support these families. This framework has six core components:

1. **Foster Data** – data is neutral information that is an essential tool in building the road map to true success.
2. **Advocacy** – ensures legislation that addresses the root cause of trauma and supports resilience is implemented.
3. **Community Investment** – utilizes resources that support efforts to address the social determinants identified by the data.
4. **Strengthen Economic Supports for Families** – lack of resources (i.e. wages, health insurance, transportation) leads to many of the social determinants that create the environment that cultivates unhealthy children. This strategy aims to improve the socioeconomic conditions of families, which tend to have the largest impacts on health.
5. **Education & Life Skills** – increases children’s access to more effective, equitable education, social-emotional learning, and life skills training.
6. **Norms & Values** – aims to strengthen norms and values that support safe, stable, and nurturing environments for children and families.

Kids Count Alaska is an ACT project that supports the first core component of this framework – Foster Data. Kids Count Alaska is part of the national KIDS COUNT program at the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF). The mission of KIDS COUNT is to ensure child advocates, policymakers, and the public have access to high-quality, unbiased data about child well-being. AECF gathers and publishes child well-being data from national and state sources online on the KIDS COUNT Data Center. Currently, the data center houses over 4 million data points at national and local levels. To provide an accessible snapshot of child well-being, KIDS COUNT compiles annual Data Books that describe national and state progress towards selected indicators of children’s economic well-being, education, health, and family/community context. KIDS COUNT engages in advocacy at the federal level.
for investments in data collection and provides funding to a network of organizations to gather data and support advocacy at the state level.

**Figure 1. Voices for Alaska’s Children Model**

ACT has operated as Alaska’s KIDS COUNT partner since 2016. Kids Count Alaska is part of the Voices for Alaska’s Children program (Voices) at ACT. Voices is a grassroots community movement focused on continually raising awareness of the needs and challenges of children, youth, and families throughout Alaska. Voices is an independent voice for children; it aims to provide a sustainable and impactful system that allows every voice to be heard during advocacy for policies and decisions that support children. The goal of Voices is to help create a normative shift that ensures children and families live in safe, stable, and nurturing environments.

**Trevor Storrs**
Executive Director
Alaska Children’s Trust
Executive Summary

KIDS COUNT is a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) that ensures child advocates, policymakers, and the public have access to high-quality, unbiased data about child well-being. Kids Count Alaska is part of the Voices for Alaska Children program at the Alaska Children’s Trust (ACT). The following summary, completed by McDowell Group, presents analysis of national and state-level KIDS COUNT data focused on the education of Alaska children.

All data included here can be found at datacenter.kidscount.org/data#AK. Analysis of this data and more is published in the report 2018 Kids Count: Education available at www.alaskachildrenstrust.org.

Alaska Children

Children make up one-quarter of Alaska’s population.

- Between 2001 and 2016, Alaska’s adult population has increased at a faster rate than its child population, meaning Alaska’s children now comprise a smaller percentage of the state’s population. The Alaska child population will continue to increase modestly through 2045.
- Population changes vary regionally. Over the last 15 years, the child population has increased steadily in the Matanuska-Susitna region, remained about the same in the Interior, Northern region, and Southwest, and decreased in all other regions.
- Most children live in two-parent families, but approximately 60,000 children live with only one parent. Nearly 40,000 single-parent households are headed by women.
- Alaska’s child population is more racially diverse than the adult population.

Education Demographics

- Most children live in homes where the head of household has a high school diploma or GED (55 percent).
- About one-third of children live with householders who have a college or graduate degree (36 percent).
- Six percent of children live in homes where the householder did not graduate from high school.
- Alaska’s per-pupil expenditure ($19,000) is higher than the U.S. average ($12,000).

Early Childhood (Ages 0-4)

- Just under half of children between the ages of 9 and 35 months received a developmental screening during the year (47 percent).
- Fifty-four percent of 3-year-old children have routine care arrangements; of these, 55 percent attend a center, preschool, or Head Start.
Half of mothers not using their preferred care arrangement for their 3-year-old say the cost is too high for the child care they would prefer (51 percent).

Just over half of Alaska 3-year-olds (58 percent) are read to every day.

Seventy-six percent of 3-year-olds watch more than an hour or more of screen time per day.

Only 30 percent of kindergarteners were Kindergarten-ready at the start of the school year.

### School Age (Ages 5-18)

- Most school-age children in Alaska are enrolled in K-12 public school (84 percent).
- Statewide, just under three-quarters of students attend school regularly (74 percent).
- One-quarter of Alaska students are chronically absent from school (26 percent).
- About one-third of Alaska students score at or above proficient on reading and math in 4th and 8th grade.
- During the 2016-17 school year, 32 percent of Alaska high school students earned credit in a Career and Technical Education (CTE) program.
- 2,003 students dropped out from school during grades 7-12 (3.5 percent) during 2016-2017.
- During the 2016-2017 school year, 7,681 students graduated in four years, for an overall graduation rate of 78 percent.

### Post-Secondary (Ages 18+)

- Less than half of the working age population (25 to 64 years) had a post-secondary degree in 2016.
- In 2016, 20 percent of young adults (ages 18 to 24) without a college degree were neither enrolled in school or currently working.
- Twenty-seven percent of young adults were enrolled in college or had already completed a college degree (21,000 adults) in 2016.

**30% of kindergartners were KINDERGARTEN READY at the start of the school year**

Source: Department of Education & Early Development

3/4 of children REGULARLY ATTEND

1/4 of children are CHRONICALLY ABSENT

Source: Department of Education & Early Development

AT OR ABOVE PROFICIENT

Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress

Less than half of the working age population (25 to 64 years) had a post-secondary degree in 2016.

In 2016, 20 percent of young adults (ages 18 to 24) without a college degree were neither enrolled in school or currently working.

Twenty-seven percent of young adults were enrolled in college or had already completed a college degree (21,000 adults) in 2016.
Finding Solutions

Alaska’s children hold the key to our future. Alaska’s schools must represent a commitment to provide quality education to all children and youth. Working parents, in order to successfully provide for their families, need the peace of mind that comes from knowing that their kids are in a safe and developmentally-appropriate environment. Policymakers need access and capacity to use consistent, high-quality data on how the system is performing plus evidence on what affects student learning and the motivation to work toward the ultimate goal of equipping all children with the skills they need to succeed in their lives. The real work of education improvement must be tackled in every school and every community. The Alaska Children’s Trust suggests the following areas of investment:

- **Available Pre-K** – Pre-K programs should be available to all students in Alaska, especially to those students in low-socioeconomic households. Because early education and care is an investment in long-term outcomes, Alaskans should focus on getting all kids into programmed care. A basic standard for quality needs to be created that allows individual programs to experiment and develop models that work in their communities. Programs should set expectations about outcomes. While early academic skills are crucial for school readiness, young children also need to develop their social and emotional skills, like self-control and cooperation, to be ready for school. The state legislature should explore new funding strategies such as tax credits, taxing districts, social impact bonds, contracts, and grants to fund these programs, and by including Pre-K students in the Base Student Allocation it offers to districts. In addition to helping ensure that children arrive at school ready to succeed, early care and education programs enable parents to meet the financial needs of their families and businesses to attract and retain a high-quality workforce.

- **Restorative Discipline Practices** – All discriminatory discipline practices should be eliminated. The state should embrace a restorative justice approach to discipline in our schools as an alternative to zero-tolerance programs and other types of disciplinary action. Programs should have goals to set policies and implement widespread preventive practices to eliminate expulsion and suspension. Entities should track data on rates of expulsion and suspension, starting in early childhood settings, and ensure that data is disaggregated, at minimum, by gender, race, ethnicity, and disability status to track disparities.

- **Available Developmental Screening** – Developmental screening should be made available to all children. Currently, only 38 percent of children in Alaska benefit from adequate screening. Infants and toddlers with developmental delays or disabilities should be identified and receive early intervention services in a timely manner. Collaborate with community-based service providers, including the child’s medical home, and connect children, families, and staff to additional services and supports as needed.

- **Mentorship & Affirmation** – The growing diversity of Alaska’s population indicates that the state should support strategies to engage children of color, by setting up mentor programs to help students reflect on personal values that reinforce self-worth and affirmation intervention programs.

- **Parent Education Goals** – Encourage parents to invest in their own education goals to provide a better future for their children. Research suggests that parental education is an important and significant predictor of child achievement. Better educated parents have, on average, better educated children. Increasing education today would lead to an increase in a capable workforce and the education of the
next generation, and improve later life outcomes such as health, productivity, and wealth for Alaska children.

- **Graduation Rates** – Develop and implement a plan for children of color to graduate at higher levels by ensuring the money reaches students who need it most. These increases should be steady and predictable, not subject to funding fluctuation. Extra funds should be provided to study the impact and model best practices. The money should be focused at the classroom level to pay, train, and support strong teachers; improve curriculum; and keep class sizes manageable. Defined success should be reexamined to focus on a wider range of outcomes, including wages, health, wellness, and other life outcomes of children and youth.

- **Access to Specialists** – All staff should have access to support from specialists, such as early childhood mental health consultants and behavior coaches. This support provides assistance in identifying needs and referring children, families, or staff for social services as needed; understanding and responding appropriately to children exposed to Adverse Child Experiences (ACEs), traumatic events or stress; developing behavior plans for children who require them; and building greater capacity to prevent and manage challenging behavior, promote social-emotional development, and engage in self-reflective practices to prevent potential biases.

- **Funding** - The state needs to look at funding its educational system in a way that provides what it would take for each child to be successful. Flat funding is not a cut to districts, although there is no increase to deal with inflationary costs. As the cost of energy and health care continue to rise, districts have had to cut program opportunities for students, increase class size, and cut support staff and resources. These outcomes exacerbate efforts to close the opportunity gap, improve the graduation rate, help with chronic absenteeism, or reduce the dropout rates in our schools.