

Alaska's Early Care and Education Workforce

The Economic Impact Report on Early Education and Child Care Services commissioned by the University of Alaska Southeast (McDowell, 2006) identifies at least 6,500 Alaskans who directly participate in the child care sector workforce.

The early care and education workforce in Alaska exceeds that of workers in the air transportation sector (6,400) and residential and nonresidential building construction sector (6,000). The McDowell Report concludes that 29,400 Alaskans (9.5% of the Alaska resident workforce) are able to join the workforce because of the availability of early care and education programs.

The early care and education workforce:

- Predominately female
- Large number of rural workers with high percentage of Alaska Natives
- Range in education from high school graduate to undergraduate and advanced degrees
- Average wage for an early childhood educator in 2005 was \$20,960
- Many underemployed workers with potential for increased compensation tied to education and training
- Disproportionately high number of older workers
- Significant number of English as second language learners

Accomplishments:

- An articulated early care and education career pathway
- A registry system for members to track early care and education professional development
- A Child Development Specialist Apprentice Program at the University of Alaska
- Early care and education advisory councils and boards with cross sector representation
- Professional development and support systems that are responsive to the demographics of the workforce

Challenges:

- Coordinating data collection and reporting systems to capture the total workforce number and real wages
- Finding financial aid and tuition assistance for workforce professional development
- Identifying and supporting the critical infrastructure role of the early care and education sector for High Growth/High Demand industries
- Engaging business in delivery of early care and education systems