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ABSTRACT

A report of the Governor's Interim Commission on Children and Youth, released in January, 1988, presented evidence that Alaska needs to formulate a comprehensive strategy to develop a strong foundation upon which Alaska's children can build productive and satisfying lives. A groundswell of support is building toward the belief that Alaska needs to take careful action that will significantly alter the way society provides for the care and education of its young children. This paper describes a broad framework upon which a strategy to address early childhood and parenting could be built. Programs for young children need to be based on how young children learn and grow, and they need to have strong components for parent and family involvement. The responsibility of the Alaska Department of Education in such a comprehensive statewide early childhood strategy should be to: (1) provide school personnel with a thorough understanding of the theoretical and practical aspects of teaching young children and supporting their needs and strengths; and (2) help educators understand how to build effective partnerships between schools and families. The aim of these two efforts is to improve school climate and to strengthen the base of support for Alaska's families. Current efforts of the Department of Education are outlined as they relate to early childhood development and parenting. Emphasis is placed on developing a partnership of parents, parent groups, politicians, public and private agencies, and public and private schools, as well as a myriad of other organizations. Also included is a description of what the Alaska Parenting Model should be, together with a philosophy and a list of objectives. (ALL)

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William G. Demmert, Jr.
Alaska Commissioner of Education

October 31, 1988

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An Early Childhood/Parenting Strategy for Alaska

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A growing body of evidence is convincing many public policy makers that Alaska needs to develop a comprehensive strategy to build a strong foundation upon which Alaska's children can build productive and satisfying lives (A Report of the Governor's Interim Commission on Children and Youth, January, 1988).

For many children, a good start in life may be seriously hindered by changing family structures caused by increasing numbers of mothers in the workforce, divorce, loss of extended family, poverty and hunger, drugs, alcohol, child abuse and neglect, and negative attitudes towards minorities (Hensley, 1988; U.S. Department of Health and Social Services, 1986; A Report of the Governor's Interim Commission on Children and Youth, 1988).

The longitudinal evidence is showing that culturally and developmentally appropriate early childhood programs for young children ages 0-8 and their families can have a significant beneficial effect on later success in life (Cummins, 1985; Grubb, 1987; Hamburg, 1987).

This has caused policy makers--many who heretofore were either uninformed of the issues or indifferent--to sit up and take notice. A groundswell of support is building toward the belief that Alaska needs to take carefully thought out action that will significantly alter the way society provides for the care and education of its young children. The Commissioner of Education clearly believes that there must be a statewide comprehensive strategy based on broad consensus. Furthermore, the commissioner believes that the framework for that strategy is laid out in the final report of the Governor's Interim Commission on Children and Youth.

The primary intent of this paper is to stimulate discussion that will lead to a broad based Alaska strategy to address early childhood and parenting issues in as comprehensive manner as possible. This paper does not attempt to describe a statewide strategy or the Department of Education's role in that strategy. This paper does attempt, however, to describe a broad framework upon which a strategy could be built. But that framework is advanced in recognition that widely divergent viewpoints in the early childhood and parenting areas warrant and deserve frank airing of differences of opinion.

In terms of that framework, the department believes that young children need programs that:

1. are based on how young children learn and grow, and
2. have strong components for parent and family involvement.

The Department of Education's responsibility in a comprehensive statewide early childhood strategy should be (1) to arm school personnel with a thorough understanding of the theoretical and classroom aspects of teaching young children and supporting their needs and strengths, and (2) to help educators understand how to build effective partnerships between schools and families. The aim of these two efforts is to improve school climate and to strengthen the base of support for Alaska's families. This will contribute to increasing achievement and furthering the welfare of school children. Recent research tells us that the children who will benefit most are the large percentage of the school population who are at risk of dropping out of school (Schweinhart and Koshel, 1986).

A recent anecdote surfaced during a workshop at the 1988 Alaska Council for the Social Studies annual conference. Forty teachers placed in small groups were asked to brainstorm contemporary trends in classroom social studies teaching. The topic, however, quickly changed to concern about the barriers to teaching and learning that the teachers are increasingly facing as children bring a growing number of social problems into the classroom. They stressed how more of their attention is devoted to children who are under the influence of drugs and alcohol, hungry, neglected, abused and unprepared, unable or unwilling to learn.

The children discussed in this illustration are already beyond their primary years. For them, it is too late to apply the techniques of prevention. They are in need of intervention. It is for the young, just born and yet to be born, that Alaska needs to develop a comprehensive strategy that alters the fundamental way Alaska society provides for the healthy development of children.

This discussion tells us that all is not perfect in Alaska's classrooms. It is clear that the problems are not just the result of inappropriate teaching methodology. Schools are doing many things quite well; educators are learning more about appropriate teaching methodology for young children and many are implementing such methodologies in our schools. The problems, rather, are a reflection of changing conditions in Alaska and across America. In short, the public school classroom mirrors the problems of the state and the nation.

Demographics, research and recent public reports give us clues as to why.

Dr. Harold L. Hodgkinson's demographic studies show a startling change in family status. In 1955, 60 percent of the households in the United States consisted of a working father, a housewife mother and two or more school age children. In 1980, that family unit was represented by only 11 percent of our homes, and by 1985 dropped to 7 percent.

Hodgkinson's findings shows that 59 percent of children born in 1983 will live with only one parent before reaching 18, which now becomes the "normal" experience. Of every 100 children born in 1983:

- * 12 were born out of wedlock
- * 40 were born to parents who will divorce before the child is 18
- * 5 were born to parents who will separate
- * 2 were born to parents of whom one will die before the child reaches 18
- * 41 will reach age 18 "normally" (Hodgkinson, 1983).

Additionally:

- * The percentage of extended families (two parents, children, and at least one other relative) has dramatically decreased. One study revealed, for example, that 50 percent of the households in a major city had extended families in 1900, compared with 4 percent in 1970.

- * Suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth 15 to 24 years of age.
- * One-fourth to one-third of all American children are born into poverty.
- * Family disorganization has been identified as the most significant antecedent of behavior disorders and social pathology, such as suicide, dropouts, drug abuse, and vandalism.

(See Addenda A and B for additional statistics.)

Dr. Peter Scales, chair of the Governor's Interim Commission on Children and Youth, related startling statistics to participants at the Department of Education's Statewide Youth At Risk Conference in March 1988. Scales said that by the year 2000 each group of 40 of today's entering first graders will exhibit the following statistics:

- * one person will commit suicide
- * four will get pregnant
- * two will give birth
- * six will run away from home
- * six will drop out of school
- * 11 will be unemployed
- * 15 will be living in poverty
- * 36 will use alcohol

Summarized Scales: "It's time for us to change direction and acknowledge that the real problem isn't teenage pregnancy, or substance abuse, or any of these in isolation. The real problem is that these are symptoms of our neglect of children. When at least one in four children fall into these problem categories, that is a symptom of our failure, not theirs."

Scales recommended that Alaska develop a coordinated five step plan, also outlined in the GICCY report, to:

1. Make a major investment in perinatal and early childhood programs.
2. Identify children at risk of school failure or social problems much earlier, and provide a broader range of support and challenge for them.
3. Promote coordinated, community-based resource systems that are culturally sensitive.
4. Promote critical thinking and life skills instruction throughout the school curriculum.
5. Link young people emotionally with their families, their communities and their cultural traditions.

Alaska Department of Education Efforts

Although the Department of Education employs only the equivalent of one full time early childhood specialist, early childhood development and parenting is woven throughout programs department wide. Recent and current department efforts include:

- * Developing programs to carry out recommendations of the Governor's Interim Commission on Children and Youth as they apply to public schools.

- * Working to establish parenting, and early childhood development and well-being as statewide priorities among the Commissioners of the Departments of Community and Regional Affairs, Education, Health and Social Services and Labor.
- * Involvement in a series of meetings with the university and school districts to address teacher training from early childhood education and parenting to postsecondary education.
- * The development by the State Board of Education of a long range strategic plan for education statewide. The plan was developed in cooperation with a broad cross section of education leaders and organizations. It addresses early childhood education.
- * Assisting First Lady Michael Cowper to plan her involvement in promoting parenting, quality early childhood programs and child care.
- * Creation of the Commissioner's Educational Issues Forum to bring together 24 education organizations and leaders to identify important issues and build consensus. Early childhood and parenting were identified. The Department believes that these consensus building sessions have been important tools in raising awareness of issues and strategies among those who are in a position to take action.
- * Ongoing efforts with Alaska Native organizations and leaders to address issues surrounding Native education, of which parenting, families and early childhood education are paramount.
- * Providing training in concert with the University of Alaska and a large number of school districts for 500 educators during the summer of 1988. The training included a number of sessions in early childhood areas. The three year old summer leadership academies are growing and the department is planning to conduct subsequent summer training sessions.
- * The employment of one full time early childhood specialist to support developmentally and culturally appropriate programs for young Alaskan children by providing technical expertise and improving school access to resources.
- * The State Board of Education adopted a document entitled "Criteria for Excellence in Early Childhood Education." The document, which describes 33 qualities of excellent early childhood education programs, is based on standards developed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- * Being a working partner of the Tri-Department Early Childhood Committee (Education, Health and Social Services, and Community and Regional Affairs). The committee meets quarterly to examine gaps and overlaps in provision of services to young children and their families, and to support a comprehensive child care and education system for Alaska's young children. This committee recently expanded to include the departments of Law, Public Safety, and Environmental Conservation.

- * Initiating efforts to provide one set of regulations for the supervision of all early childhood programs for children 3 to 5 years old. Many early childhood programs are providing both educational and child care services and comply with Department of Education preschool regulations and Department of Health and Social Services child care regulations. This creates unnecessary duplication of supervision. The use of one set of regulations, with DHSS supervising early childhood centers, will enable the Department of Education to strengthen its effort to provide technical assistance to public schools in the area of design and implementation of developmentally and culturally appropriate programs.
- * Developing a traveling parenting curriculum for health, science and home economics teachers. Each unit is a self-contained instructional kit complete with charts, teachers guide, video cassettes, filmstrips, audio tapes, books, transparencies, posters, and special resources.
- * Publishing news stories in statewide publications recognizing two early childhood education programs that earned accreditation through the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs.
- * Supporting the development of the Kindergarten Network focusing on helping teachers design and implement developmentally and culturally appropriate kindergarten programs. The group will help revise the Alaska State Model Kindergarten Curriculum.
- * Increasing to 104 the number of certificated preschool programs for three- to five-year-olds. Certification is awarded on the basis of standards which protect the health and safety of young children and assure adequate programs and opportunity for development. The certification process provides for the department early childhood specialist to suggest improvements and offer technical assistance. Because of funding constraints, the early childhood specialist conducts on-site monitoring only for programs about which the department has received complaints.
- * Conducting an annual Preschool Demographic Report, which reports by school district the numbers of local preschools, numbers of children attending preschools, funding sources, and languages spoken other than English. Information from the report is used by legislators, service agencies and others for policy decisions and program implementation.
- * Applying to the Fred Meyer Foundation for a grant to develop six urban and rural parenting pilot sites. The grant was not funded.
- * Applying to the Bernard van Leer Foundation with the University of Fairbanks for funding of an early childhood and parenting pilot. The proposal is pending.
- * As a member of the Interagency Coordinating Council under the Governor's Council on Gifted and Handicapped, assisted in the coordination and establishment of comprehensive service plans for handicapped children in Alaska from birth to age 5. This multi-agency group focuses on the federal mandate of PL 99-457 and agencies responsible for complying with that law.

- * Initiating a statewide preschool education program aimed at handicapped 3- to 5 year olds. All school districts are required to provide special education services to handicapped preschool aged children. In addition, the Department of Education worked with Health and Social Services to define respective roles in serving handicapped children from birth to two years old.
- * Creating a coalition of parents of handicapped children that emphasizes the role of parents in working with their children. A conference, expected to draw 600 parents, is scheduled for FY 1989. Thirty-five parents from 22 communities attended a conference for handicapped children and youth in April 1988.
- * Serving 1,528 economically disadvantaged children aged 3-5 statewide through federal Chapter I funds.
- * Distributing \$100,000 monthly in federal funds to 118 day care sites serving 3,700 children for reimbursement under the Child Care Food Program; and \$200,000 monthly in federal funds to 550 day care home providers serving 2,000 children for meal reimbursement under the Family Day Care Home Program. Total funds distributed by the Department in FY 1987 under these two programs totalled \$2.9 million.
- * Supporting public library services for children and their families to foster the development of pre-reading and reading skills and to help families establish the "library habit". The State Library provides materials, story-hours, service by mail to rural areas, and training for village library aides.
- * Developing a handbook for school district personnel and others to start school-aged child care programs.
- * Focusing the statewide annual 1988 Community Education Conference on school-aged child care.

The Department of Education Early Childhood Focus

The department's primary concern should be to continue to help formulate and implement a statewide comprehensive child development and parenting strategy. From the department's viewpoint, this strategy should include a partnership of parents and parent groups, local and state politicians, public and private agencies, public and private schools, child care providers, employers, professional associations, non-profit organizations, the University of Alaska, and various state departments, including Community and Regional Affairs, Education, Health and Social Service and Public Safety. The Governor's Interim Commission on Children and Youth with its formal report in January 1988 has provided a framework for a comprehensive statewide direction. Each organization now must act with constituent groups to develop individual strategies and priorities in concert with the statewide strategy. No one organization can act alone. Schools cannot. Parents cannot. Government agencies cannot. All must act in relative unison.

As its next step in contributing to a statewide strategy, the Department of Education in concert with its constituent groups will develop a comprehensive plan for early childhood. **The Department of Education must support existing programs and assist in the development of new early childhood programs which utilize proven teaching methods that are culturally and developmentally sound.** Many of these methods are outlined in recent publications and productions of organizations such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (NAEYC, 1988; ASCD, 1988).

Public schools should seriously consider the recommendations of a report released in October 1988 by the National Association of State Boards of Education entitled "Right from the Start". The report, authored by a national panel that included Alaska's First Lady Michael Cowper, recommends that public elementary schools restructure themselves to better address the needs of young children ages 4 to 8. The second major recommendation NASBE makes is for public schools to "develop partnerships with other early childhood programs and community agencies to build and improve services for young children and their parents." NASBE's five central characteristics of an elementary school structured to meet the needs of 4 to 8 year olds include:

- * **Curriculum** "based on a knowledge of the typical development of children within a particular age range, but at the same time sensitive to individual age differences among children."
- * **Assessment** through observation and recording of student progress, such as samples of writing and drawing making up a portfolio that can be used to adapt curriculum, plan activities and provide feedback to parents.
- * **Responsiveness** to cultural and linguistic diversity that reflects the reality that young children come to school closely tied to the language and the culture of their home.
- * **Partnerships** with parents that recognize parents as a primary influence in the lives of their children and as essential partners in their education.
- * **Training and support** to assure a well-trained staff, and sensitive and knowledgeable administrators (A report of the National Association of State Boards of Education, 1988).

The Department of Education should assist these early childhood elementary units in three ways:

- * develop model curriculum for preschool through grade 3 based on how young children learn and interfaced with established Department of Education model curriculum guides.
- * develop model programs with monetary incentives and recognition for programs whose qualities meet state criteria for effective early childhood programs or who meet the accreditation standards of the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs.
- * provide technical assistance for school district policy makers, administrators, teachers, caregivers and parents, through groups such as the Kindergarten Network, to promote culturally and developmentally appropriate programs and practices.

The department should seek to ensure that the statewide comprehensive strategy includes a **stable state funding source** such as the Public School Foundation Program or an educational endowment for existing preschool programs and for creating new preschool programs which integrate parent and family involvement, and for programs for 0-3 year olds and their families. A program to support parents in child-rearing is crucial. The comprehensive strategy should assign responsibilities to various agencies for providing the family support services.

The University of Alaska system should be a partner with the Departments of Education and Community and Regional Affairs and the education community to conduct preservice and inservice training for certified teachers, paraprofessionals, school administrators, school board members, child care providers, parents, persons who provide other family services, and other community members. The Department of Education supports the development of a coordinated effort for delivery of Child Development Associate training, the development of a postsecondary four-year early childhood degree program and the establishment of teacher certification requirements which emphasize child development and family support for kindergarten through third grade teachers.

An Alaska Parenting Model

Using the experience of existing research, the Alaska Parenting Model should **involve parents as their children's primary and most influential teachers**. The goal is to help parents and families understand and appreciate the role of nurturing and educating young children and to share information with families and offer support.

Home-, community- and center-based programs should support family-strengthening activities and should focus on parents, family members and children. The Alaska Parenting Model should hold in the highest regard the distinct needs of local communities and their families by assisting communities to develop programs that reflect specific cultural and geographical needs and interests.

An Alaska model can learn a great deal from the Head Start experience, which owes much of its success to a high degree of parent and community involvement.

The Alaska Parenting Model Philosophy

The philosophical foundation of an Alaska Parenting Model should be built upon **respect for the ability of parents and family members to judge their own needs and to know what they want to learn**. This leads to a parent-centered curriculum where parents take responsibility for planning and directing appropriate activities. In developing its parenting model, the Department of Education has borrowed from the model built by the State of Minnesota, which the department believes is appropriate for use in Alaska. Specific elements of the philosophy:

1. **Respect:** Family educators, often members of the communities in which they serve, must recognize the issues encountered among Alaska's diverse cultures. Family educators who are not from the local community must participate in training which emphasizes recognition of these issues. An intrinsic respect for different values, cultures and belief systems must be reflected by the staff through their programs, curriculum, written material and presentations. This includes planning workshops, discussion groups and home visits that acknowledge and respect the varying cultural groups within the community, and using those groups in the planning and development of materials and presentation.
2. **Trust:** Family educators must trust the ability of parents to take responsibility and make good choices for their own families. Family educators must not tell parents how to run their lives or how to solve their problems, and must not put themselves in the role of expert. This approach leads parents to doubt their own abilities and undermines their self-confidence. It is up to each individual family to rear their children effectively. Even parents with a history of abusing or neglecting their children need to be treated as capable of responsible action, not controlled by outsiders who seek to take over their jobs.
3. **Acceptance:** A nonjudgmental approach is essential. Parents are generally not good or bad - they are different. All parents struggle with the job of being parents and need support. Parent group leaders must be careful to accept parents and families as they are. Unless emotionally disturbed or completely overwhelmed by life's difficulties, parents want to learn and grow in their parenting role. Consequently, family education programs are for all families, not just those in the high risk category.
4. **Raising Children:** All parents need to find their own ways to raise children based on family values, life styles and personalities. It is essential that more than one method or theory of child rearing be available for review and discussion. Parents need many different tools and methods to use in their jobs. Some tools are very effective with one age group and not with another. Some methods work very well with one type of child but not with another.
5. **Learning Styles:** It is important to offer learning situations to parents and family members in a variety of learning styles, offering hands-on learning for the kinesthetic learner, listening and sharing for the auditory learner, written forms of learning for the visual learner, and varied mixtures of styles which adapt to the needs of the families served.
6. **Variety of Intelligences and developmental characteristics:** Family educators must understand and help parents to understand that all children develop a variety of equally important intelligences including spatial, linguistic, intrapersonal, interpersonal, musical, kinesthetic, and mathematical-logical. They must help parents to understand the development of the whole child emotionally, socially, physically, intellectually and creatively. Discussion with parents should include ways to support the development of these intelligences and the areas of development (Gardner, 1987).

Objectives of the Alaska Parenting Model

Objectives of the Alaska Parenting Model include:

1. To engage the interest, support, and talents of parents and families in recognizing and meeting the emotional, intellectual, social/cultural and physical needs of children.
2. To promote healthy self concepts among family members.
3. To share alternative child-rearing approaches with parents and families and to offer them a chance to share skills, techniques, cultural differences and ideas with each other.
4. To provide positive creative learning experiences for parents, families and children.
5. To help provide the best learning environments possible for children of different ages, cultures and gender.

Examples of Services Offered by An Alaska Parenting Model

Most of the items listed below summarize the services offered by successful programs in other settings. They are examples of services that could be developed under an Alaska Parenting Model making allowances for different local and regional needs:

1. Center-based parent and family education offers information on child development and opportunities for parents and families to share alternative child-rearing styles, cultural variations, their advantages and disadvantages. Activities include formal and informal small group discussions, guest lectures, workshops, field trips, observation of and participation in learning experiences for children.
2. Home-based parent and family education serve families living in more isolated circumstances. Local staff members visit homes on a regular basis to bring program activities to parents and children.
3. Child development activities are offered in a central community location to meet the social, emotional, physical and intellectual needs of young children. Sessions are conducted on a weekly basis and last from one to three hours. Activities are offered for mixed age groups, or separately, for infants, toddlers, and pre-elementary children. The activities are held simultaneously with center-based parent education sessions.
4. Prenatal and early childhood health screening detect barriers to a child's healthy growth and development and potential learning difficulties. Parents are informed about how such problems as substance abuse, malnutrition, and abuse and neglect can affect their child. Programs are designed in cooperation with other agencies to coordinate health screening services and follow-up referrals, and to support families who are at-risk and parents with at-risk children.
5. Resource libraries within communities broaden the scope of information available to parents and families by providing opportunities to freely and conveniently borrow materials such as durable and developmentally appropriate children's toys, publications for parents, children books, and other materials related to family education.

6. Pre-parenting education for adolescents builds awareness of the responsibilities and rewards of being a parent. Junior high and high school students serve as aides in child development activities to promote interaction with young children. Instruction in child development is offered to elementary, junior high and high school students.
7. Community-based cultural learning centers in partnership with schools can build meaningful cooperative learning experiences that are culturally appropriate for grandparents, young children, and teenagers. As grandparents resume their traditional roles as educators/transmitters of language and cultural knowledge, social relationships inherently based on each cultural group's social mores will be established and enriched. These centers provide support for the traditional role of the grandparents and elders as educators of elementary, middle school, and high school students. Middle school and high school students serve as aides for the grandparents while they interact with young children. Opportunities for positive community and university involvement can be realized through the cultural learning centers as adults and postsecondary students participate in the activities and conduct research.
8. A strong public information component is needed to build awareness and public understanding.
9. Logistical support for child care, transportation and other services required to support families involved in family education programs (Parsons, et. al. 1986).

The department should provide leadership for public schools by supporting elementary, middle and high school model parenting pilots and projects in urban and rural areas of the state. "Education for Parenting," created in Philadelphia, is a highly successful K-8 curriculum which integrates parenting into reading, writing, math and social studies and could be adopted to Alaska schools. There are others.

Other elements of the Alaska Model should include training opportunities for citizens through community education, coordination and cooperation between the Department of Education and other state agencies, universities, schools, community agencies, including Native groups, churches, non-profit and private corporations.

A statewide cadre of family educators should be trained. These educators would train locally selected family educators to insure sensitivity to local needs, cultures, and life styles.

A strong evaluation component is essential to promote program improvement.

A Final Note

For Alaska to properly support the success of all children in public school, Alaska must first focus its efforts on strengthening families. As stated by David Hamburg of the Carnegie Foundation, "The most successful interventions in the zero-to-five-year age period have certain basic characteristics. They start early. They involve the parents substantially in the effort for the long pull. They strengthen natural social support networks. They provide educational activities for young children that have a moderately stimulating quality. They sustain contact with mothers and children over relatively long periods..." (Hamburg, 1987).

In the words of the Governor's Interim Commission on Children and Youth, 1988, "Support for parents to learn good parenting is the single greatest investment Alaska can make in strong families".

ADDENDUM A: National statistics

- * From March 1970 to 1979, the number of single-parent families maintained by women rose by 80 percent. Those maintained by men increased by more than 70 percent.
- * Single-parent families are headed largely by females and face economic difficulties rarely encountered by families maintained by males. In 1978, 42 percent of single-parent families maintained by the mother had incomes below the poverty level, compared with 15 percent of those maintained by the father and six percent of all two-parent families.
- * In 1910, 40 percent of the American population lived in an urban setting, compared to 76 percent in 1976.
- * The average family moves 14 times. 20 percent of the American population moves each year.
- * By the age of 16, the average child has spent more time watching television than in school.
- * One million youths run away from home each year.
- * Approximately 3.7 million children under six are considered to be at "high risk". An additional 2.2 million children are considered "at risk" based on income levels of their parents.
- * Compared to forty-one other industrialized countries, the United States has the sixteenth highest infant mortality rate.

ADDENDUM B: Alaska Statistics:

- * Twenty one percent of Alaska's population is under the age of 11 years, and 11 percent is under five years.
- * In Anchorage, 70 percent of single mothers with children under six years of age are working outside the home.
- * Twenty-three percent of single fathers have sole responsibility for their children who are six years old or younger.
- * Fifty-two percent of Alaska's population is in the child bearing age, the highest in the nation; this is nine percent above the national average.
- * Alaska women have children at a younger age, have more children, and return to work sooner than the national average.

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