



[http://www.kodiakdailymirror.com/news/article\\_317c1020-1cb0-11ea-9fd7-5b511ca0f7da.html](http://www.kodiakdailymirror.com/news/article_317c1020-1cb0-11ea-9fd7-5b511ca0f7da.html)

## Community members discuss early childhood education in Kodiak

By IRIS SAMUELS [iris@kodiakdailymirror.com](mailto:iris@kodiakdailymirror.com) 10 hrs ago

Parents and child care providers gathered Monday to share their views on early childhood education in Kodiak, highlighting the need for more affordable options. The meeting was part of a statewide effort to create a comprehensive plan for early childhood care in Alaska.

The effort is supported by a one-year federal Preschool Development Grant, targeting children from birth to age 5. The grant, from the Office of Child Care in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, was given to the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development in December 2018, and ends at the end of this month. Alaska is one of 46 states and territories to receive a grant of this type.

The Alaska department received \$2.6 million in federal funds, and tasked the Association of Alaska School Boards with completing a needs assessment. The association then selected Denali Daniels and Associates, an Anchorage-based strategic planning firm, to lead the design of the strategic plan. This marks the first effort to create a statewide plan for early childhood education.

"The needs assessment is supposed to reveal a lot of those things about our state that we haven't ever put together before," said Betsy Brenneman, the Preschool Development Grant coordinator. The 50-page needs assessment will be available to the public in January.

"Everybody wants to know what the needs are and the gaps and the challenges, so they can do their own work and use this to write a strategic plan that people like you can take to your municipality or to go to the Legislature," Brenneman said. "It's really a way to look at the system comprehensively."

On Tuesday, representatives of the association of school boards and the strategic planning firm traveled to Kodiak to gather input from community members. The Kodiak visit was the first of numerous planned site visits, with future meetings scheduled in places like Bethel and Kotzebue.

According to Brenneman, the goal of the site visits is to incorporate additional input from rural and low-income families. During the visit to Kodiak, Brenneman and Daniels met with parents and caretakers in Kodiak, and teleconferenced with caretakers in Ouzinkie, Akhiok, Port Lions and Old Harbor.

The needs assessment revealed that 49% of families in the state can afford early child care. Only 28% of families have early child care available to meet their needs, and 20% of families are satisfied with the quality of health care.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends that child care consume no more than 7% of family income. However, married couples pay an average of 12% of their income for child care, and the number is higher for single-parent households, rising to 34% for single mother households.

In Kodiak, the survey found that 20% of children under the age of 6 are living under the federal poverty line. Parents attending the meeting noted the limited availability of licensed day care providers and facilities, and said current options are too expensive for families that do not qualify for public assistance.

Future goals listed by workshop attendees included universal preschool access, early language instruction, collaboration between providers, and "more men." Of the 15 community members that attended the session, including parents and caretakers, all were women.

Feedback from workshop attendees will be incorporated into the strategic plan, which is expected to be completed in the coming months.

"There's a lot more to do, as we all know," Brenneman said.

