



Education

Katie Cueva ScD MAT MPH¹ & Dayna Jean DeFeo, PhD²

Current Status/Trends

Most schools and childcare facilities were closed in Anchorage the week of March 16th. As of April 24, 139 childcare facilities in Anchorage were reported open,ⁱ and 70 were enrolling.

Early Childhood Education: An estimated 19,700 children under the age of 5 live in the Municipality of Anchorage, with an estimated 230 childcare facilities in Anchorage serving them.ⁱⁱ ⁱⁱⁱ Early childhood education facilities employed an estimated 2,700 childcare workers, including administrators and preschool instructors.^{iv}

K12 schools: The Anchorage School District (ASD) enrolled 46,115 students and employed about 2,600 teachers and 3,000 staff. ASD has 98 schools (including 9 high, 10 middle, and 58 elementary)^v. 8.9% of ASD families had incomes below the poverty level, and 14% received food stamps. 5% of ASD students had a disability, 16% spoke a language other than English at home, and 34% lived in single parent households.^{vi} Anchorage also has 11 private K12 schools, with 1,129 students and 155 teachers.^{vii} ASD high and middle schoolers have been taking online classes, and elementary students were mailed work packets.^{viii} About 4% of families did not have Wi-Fi at home, and 5% did not have devices^{ix} that access the Internet; ASD distributed 9,096 laptops and 804 hotspots. In the week of 4/13, less than half of students in grades 9-12 logged in to access ASD content.^x

Postsecondary education: Nine colleges operated in Anchorage, plus career and technical education programs, barber/beauty schools, union apprenticeship training programs, flight schools, and schools for religious instruction.^{xi} UAA is the largest, enrolling 14,644 students in the fall of 2018. Typically, 18% of students took classes via distance only, 38% did some distance, 48% entirely face-to-face learning. 82% of UAA students received some kind of financial aid. 94% of students were Alaska residents and 2% were international. 54% of undergraduates attended part-time.^{xii} UAA dormitories were mostly closed, all classes are online, and nonessential employees on stay-at-home orders. In spring 2020, students had a pass/fail option for all courses, and extended withdrawal and incomplete deadlines. All in-person campus events have been cancelled. April 2020 student surveys indicate that 4% do not have adequate Internet access where they live.

Influence of Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions in Anchorage

Educational facilities have lost enrollment and tuition, and those without sufficient financial support may be unable to pay staff and remain financially solvent, which could create future shortages of available services. Most students and school staff are no longer in a school environment, reducing their risk of contracting/transmitting COVID-19. However, many have transitioned to remote learning, which is particularly challenging for younger children, English language learners,^{xiii} and for those without Internet access. Long shutdowns may exacerbate existing disparities in educational outcomes.

Early Childhood and K12 Education

- Children appear to be less vulnerable to severe illness and death from COVID-19 than adults, although they still may become infected, transmit the virus, become severely ill, and die.
- About 85% of ASD parents are in the labor force;^{xiv} many may not be able to afford private childcare options.

Higher Education

- The CARES act includes higher education support, but does not cover all lost revenue;^{xv} UAA is planning extended furloughs for employees unable to perform job duties remotely, and 10-day furloughs for executive leadership.
- Nationwide, college enrollments are projected to drop 15% in fall 2020.
- April 2020 UAA student surveys indicate 77% felt that COVID-19 anxiety interfered with their academic success, and 40% had challenges balancing school and family life.
- Delivery of instruction for programs requiring clinical placements (e.g., nursing, social work) has not yet been determined. The Alaska Department of Education and Early Development will grant licenses to student teachers whose practicum experience hours were cut short, so they will be eligible for hire in the fall; however, applications for initial teaching licenses have dropped at least 33% since March, indicating a likely teacher shortage in the fall.^{xvi}

¹ Assistant Professor of Health Policy, Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER), University of Alaska Anchorage

² Director of the Center for Alaska Education Policy Research (CAEPR); Research Assistant Professor of Education Policy, Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER), University of Alaska Anchorage

Suggested Monitoring

Ongoing monitoring could further describe the impact of COVID-19 on education in Anchorage, allowing adjustments to be made to limit negative outcomes, and to identify and support both student success and reductions in educational disparities. Monitoring could include:

- **Access to education**, such as student access to Internet and login rates via student surveys/monitoring conducted by ASD and UAA or student access to enriching homeschooling environments through household surveys
- **Educational outcomes**, via routine ASD academic tests, and comparing this year's grades, student retention, and graduation rates with previous years/semesters
- **Impacts of NPIs on families**, via UAA, thread, State of Alaska Maternal and Child Health surveys^{xvii}
- **Delivery of school-related services** (e.g., occupational, physical, and speech therapy), as monitored by ASD
- **Acquisition of COVID-19 traced to education** or childcare among both students and staff, via State investigation
- **Role of youth in COVID-19 transmission** from ongoing research
- **Student health outcomes** like mental health, overweight/obesity, physical activity, or nutrition; note: metrics may not be readily available from existing datasets
- **Impact on UAA revenues** from research/donors, as monitored and reported by UAA
- **Strategies to reduce viral transmission** used in countries such as Denmark and China where schools have reopened, and in states that may open schools before Anchorage
- **Alaska workforce development impacts**, including the number of graduates in high-demand sectors as monitored by higher education institutions in Anchorage

Recommendations

Now

- **Continue supporting special populations** to ensure their needs are met, such as students who are; food insecure, minorities, English language learners, in low income brackets, have disabilities, or live in unsafe homes.

Summer

- **Continue supporting school plans** for maintaining social distancing and hygiene (including guidelines for when to stay home), as well as plans for what to do if a student or staff member tests positive.

When schools reopen

- **Consider alternative options** for children whose parents elect to keep them home after schools reopen.
- **Focus on additional social and emotional supports** for students and families.
- **Offer differentiated approaches**, as employees and students in high-risk groups may choose not to return to school settings, or may have other spec

Additional Support Available from UAA, if Requested

Now

- Study the effects on school/education facility employees, including unemployment, underemployment, and impacts on personal finances
- Monitor, collect, and summarize relevant information from existing education-related surveys in Anchorage
- Collect and summarize primary data collection on relevant indicators and perspectives not collected elsewhere, such as on factors influencing online learning participation

Summer

- Investigate virus transmission and spread from open childcare facilities and model virus transmission and spread from different reopening scenarios
- Consider impacts on student performance outcomes in the K12 and college systems, including grades, retention, promotion, and graduation
- Look at the fiscal impacts and viability of different educational institutions in a variety of reopening/closure scenarios
- Study professional development/training supports that teachers and faculty need to offer high-quality online education
- Model the spring 2020 closures' impact on the supply of licensed teachers available to work in the public K12 system

When schools reopen

- Monitor impact of school reopening on case counts and virus transmission
- Assess student learning needs and achievement gaps exacerbated by closures, and plan responsive supports
- Support teachers and other educators, particularly new teachers whose practicum experiences were truncated, and those who continue to deliver online instruction

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