



Education and Early Childhood Development

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The F-35 Beddown at Eielson Air Force Base will bring an additional 1,930 individuals under the age of 17, for a total of 30,705 individuals age 17 and under in the FNSB by 2030. Approximately 62 percent of these individuals will be school-age, with the rest under the age of four.
- There is overall capacity available at the school district level to support this increase, but many of the individual schools near Eielson AFB are at capacity and may struggle to accommodate more students. In particular, there may be a shortage of facility capacity for elementary and middle school age students, beginning in 2021-2022.
- The FNSB region has a shortage of affordable infant and preschool age child care options. On-base care at EAFB is also maxed out, although in recent months the Air Force has successfully expanded provider capacity, thereby increasing the number of child care slots and reducing the number of children on waiting lists.
- To help meet the education and child care needs of EAFB families, a series of programmatic, policy, communication, and funding-related recommendations are offered at the end of this chapter.



The F-35 Beddown will increase the number of households in the Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB), both on Eielson Air Force Base and in the surrounding community. Many of these households will be accompanied by school-children and will need access to quality education, child care and other family supports. This chapter summarizes school district enrollment trends, population forecasts, and perspectives from educators and residents on student population growth and the ability of local schools to absorb the increase. It also discusses potential gaps and offers recommendations to ensure the community is prepared to accommodate the influx of students over the coming years.

According to Blue Star Families’ Annual Military Family Lifestyle Survey (2017):

32% of service members and 39% of military spouses identified “military child education” as one of their top five military family issues of concern.



Another key focus of this chapter is the availability and need for child care, both on-base and in the surrounding community. Affordable child care is critical to maintaining a high quality of life for incoming families. High child care costs can discourage or prevent spouses from working, create burdensome cost pressures on households and impact the availability of affordable child care for other FNSB residents. The recommendations at the end of this chapter include a set of proposed strategies for increasing the availability of affordable child care for both military-connected and FNSB resident households.

In addition to their critical role as education centers for developing minds, child care centers and schools are also gathering places that link military families to their communities. This role is especially important for families who have recently relocated and are seeking ways to engage, contribute and connect in a new place. The availability and quality of early childhood development, child care and education options factor into a military family’s decision on where to live during their time at Eielson and whether to stay in the FNSB area after military service. By ensuring military personnel and their families have access to quality education and child care, existing FNSB households will mutually benefit from improvements in service, access and sustained economic growth as a result of the F-35 Beddown.

“ When deciding where to live, we look at the quality of schools nearby and the availability of after school activities. ”

-Eielson AFB Focus Group Participant

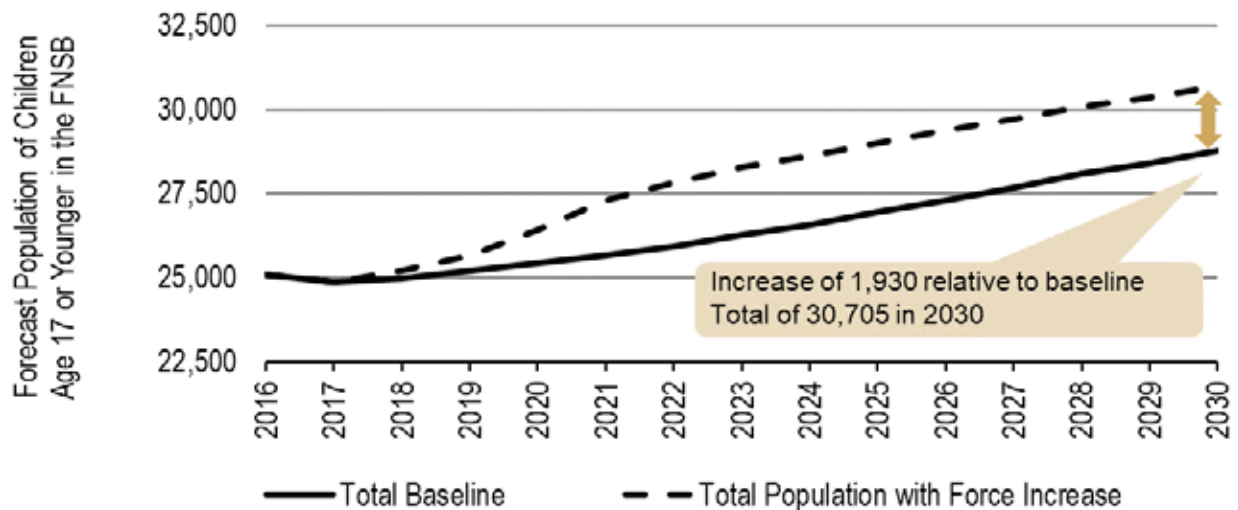
PROJECTED NEED

The F-35 Beddown will bring approximately 1,353 new active duty personnel to Eielson Air Force Base, with an additional 1,782 dependents (including spouses and children). These families have already started to arrive. The number of households will continue to increase incrementally over the next five years as the Air Force expands capacity. Most of the additional households will be in place by year 2022.

Northern Economics’ REMI model, which develops population and employment forecasts based on historic, current and projected trends, estimates the F-35 Beddown will result in gradual and modest population growth for the FNSB. Since 2010, FNSB has experienced high outmigration

rates, meaning more residents are leaving the region than moving to the region. Over the past six years, these losses have been somewhat, but not completely, offset by natural population increases due to a higher rate of births compared with deaths. The REMI model predicts the F-35 Beddown will slow the loss of residents to outmigration; when combined with birth and death rates, this will result in an overall increase in the population over the coming years.¹ Taking into account the new Air Force households and induced growth forecasts, the REMI model estimates that by 2030, FNSB will have an additional 1,930 individuals under the age of 17 above the baseline population without the F-35s, for an estimated total of 30,705 individuals age 17 and under by 2030 (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1: PRELIMINARY POPULATION PROJECTIONS FOR INDIVIDUALS AGE 17 AND UNDER



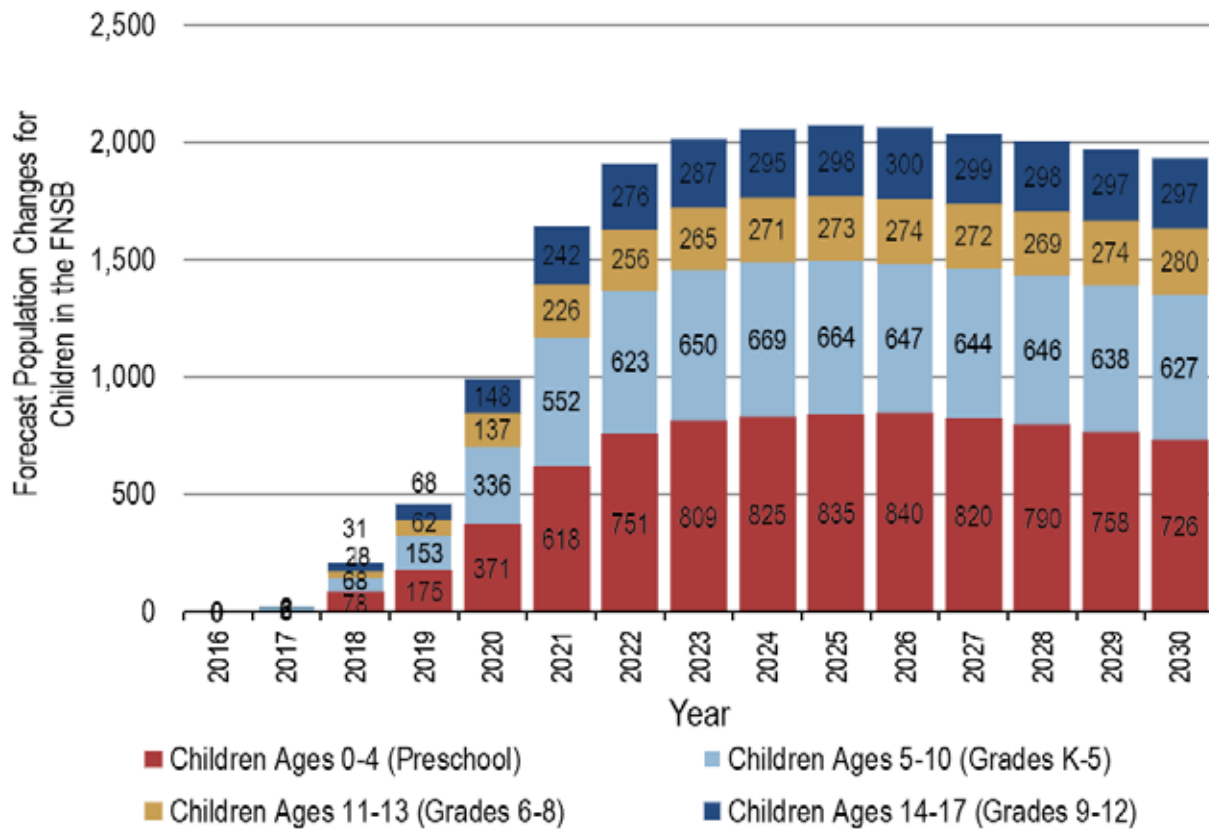
Source: Northern Economics REMI Model

¹ For more detail on the REMI model methodology, inputs and estimates, see Growth Projections Focus Area.

Figure 2 breaks down the annual projected populations over baseline numbers by age group for those 17 and under. The largest increases are in the youngest age cohort, which includes infants and preschool children ages four and under. This age group is projected to experience the largest increases, with the highest count in 2026 with an estimated 840 additional young residents. The age group with the second largest increase is elementary-aged students ages five through ten (peak of 669 additional residents in 2024), with smaller increases in youth ages 11 through 13 (peak of 280 additional residents in 2030) and youth ages 14 through 17 (peak of 300 in 2026). Since the largest increases are projected to occur at

the younger ages (zero through four), the Eielson F-35 Beddown will likely have the strongest impact on demand for preschool and infant child care providers, as well as elementary schools. Since most of the families arriving at EAFB will ultimately be departing again for another station and replaced by other young families with similar demographics, the ratios of young children relative to older children stays similar over time. The specific impacts on schools will depend on where military families opt to live and enroll their children, while impacts on child care will depend on how many of the families with young children seek child care and the type of care they choose.

FIGURE 2: PRELIMINARY ANNUAL POPULATION INCREASES BY AGE COHORT



Source: Northern Economics REMI Model

SUMMARY OF EXISTING PROGRAMS, SERVICES, INFRASTRUCTURE

Schools

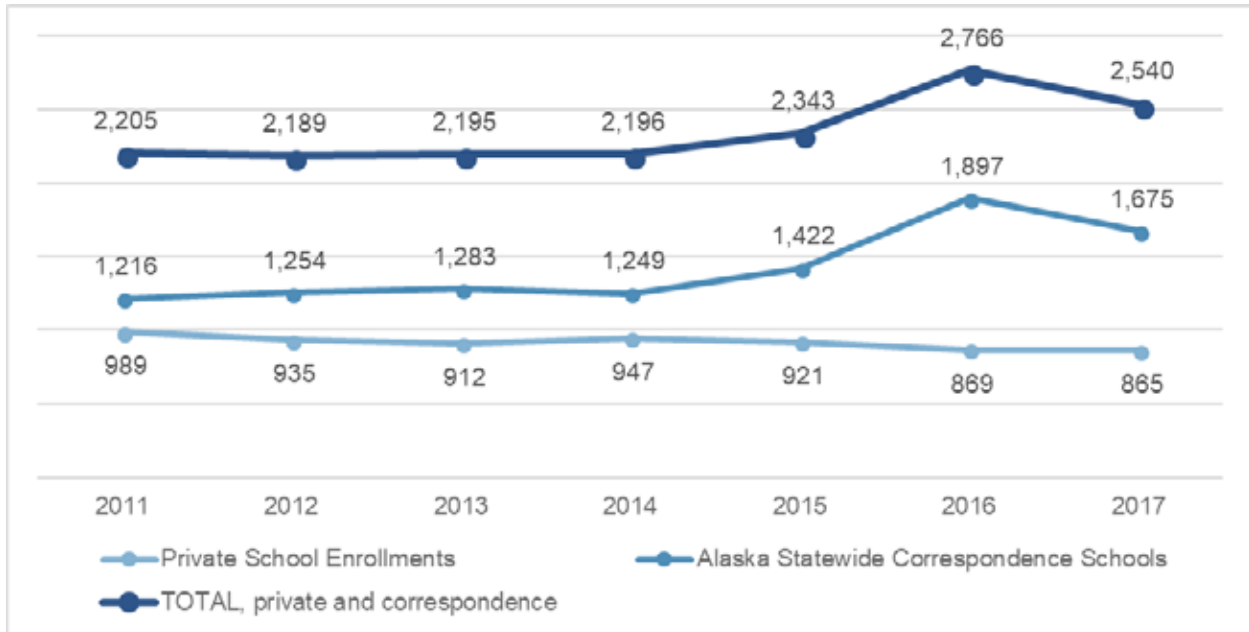
Enrollment and Capacity

The FNSB has 36 schools, including four schools on military installations. On EAFB, kindergarten through second graders attend Anderson Elementary, third through six graders attend Crawford Elementary and middle and high school students attend Ben Eielson Junior/Senior High School. Total district enrollment in the 2017-2018 school year is 13,702 students, a one percent decline from the prior year of 13,840. Overall enrollment has shown a slight decline over the past eight years from a peak during the 2009-2010 school year (see Figure 3).²

While most school-age children attend the FNSB School District public schools, some are enrolled in private schools and statewide correspondence schools. According to the Winter 2017 issue of the FNSB Community Research Quarterly, there are 865 children enrolled in private schools and 1,675 children enrolled in correspondence schools in the 2017-2018 school year, for a total of 2,540 students enrolled in non-public schools (see Figure 3). Private school enrollment has been declining slightly since 2011. Between 2014 and 2016 there was a 52 percent increase in enrollment in statewide correspondence schools. When viewed as current percentages, 84 percent of children are enrolled in public schools, 10 percent in statewide correspondence schools and 5 percent in private schools.

² From the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, Statistics and Reports. Accessed August 2, 2017. <https://education.alaska.gov/stats/>

FIGURE 3: FNSB STUDENT ENROLLMENT IN PRIVATE AND CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS



Source: FNSB Community Research Quarterly, Winter 2017; Private school enrollment data comes from the Community Research Survey; statewide correspondence school enrollment comes from Alaska Department of Education & Early Development, Foundation Program Administrator, “Alaska Statewide Correspondence School Enrollments, FNSB School District, Attendance Office, “FTE October 20-school-Day ADM Count or October Count Period-Head Count (when ADM not available)”, Juneau, Alaska, personal communication, 2011-2018.

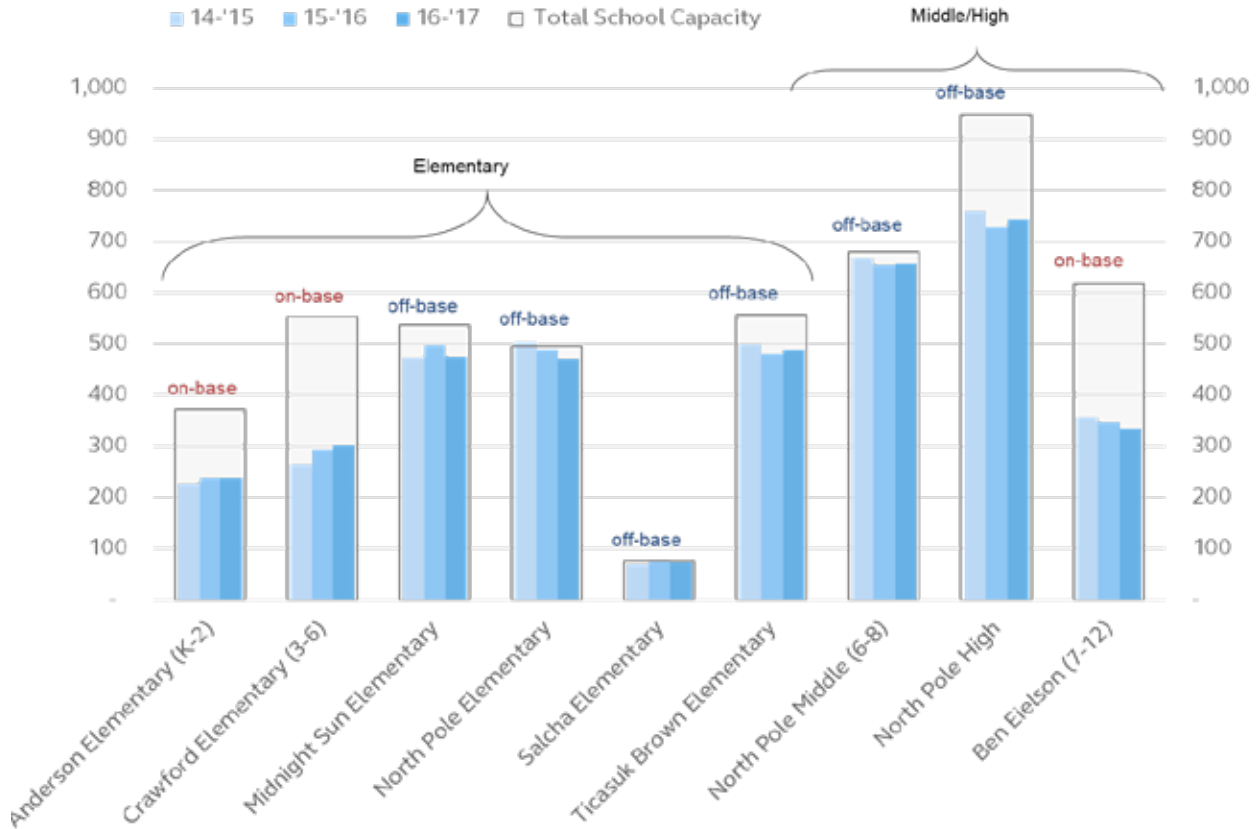
The FNSB School District is at 79 percent capacity, based on the combined capacity of each facility. While district counts show an overall decline in enrollment, specific enrollment trends by school vary. The schools on or near (within 20 minutes) of EAFB will be most impacted by the increase in individuals 17 and under, thus the importance of understanding both enrollment and capacity at these schools. Figure 4 shows enrollment trends and total capacity for schools on and near EAFB over the past five years, with total facility capacity for each school. Schools are listed left to right from elementary school to high school. As of the 2016-

2017 school year, the three schools on EAFB have significant capacity to take on additional students, while the elementary and middle schools in the area are at or near capacity:

Located On Base

- Anderson Elementary (kindergarten through second grade, on-base): 65 percent capacity
- Crawford Elementary (third through sixth grade, on-base): 54 percent capacity
- Ben Eielson Junior-Senior High (on-base)

FIGURE 4: SCHOOL ENROLLMENT AND CAPACITY FOR SCHOOLS ON AND NEAR EAFB



Source: FNSB School District

Located Near Base

- Midnight Sun Elementary (formerly Badger Road Elementary, off-base): 89 percent capacity
- North Pole Elementary (off-base): 99 percent capacity
- Salcha Elementary (off-base): 96 percent capacity
- Ticasuk Brown Elementary (off-base): 90 percent capacity
- North Pole Middle School (off-base): 96 percent capacity
- North Pole High School (off-base): 78 percent capacity

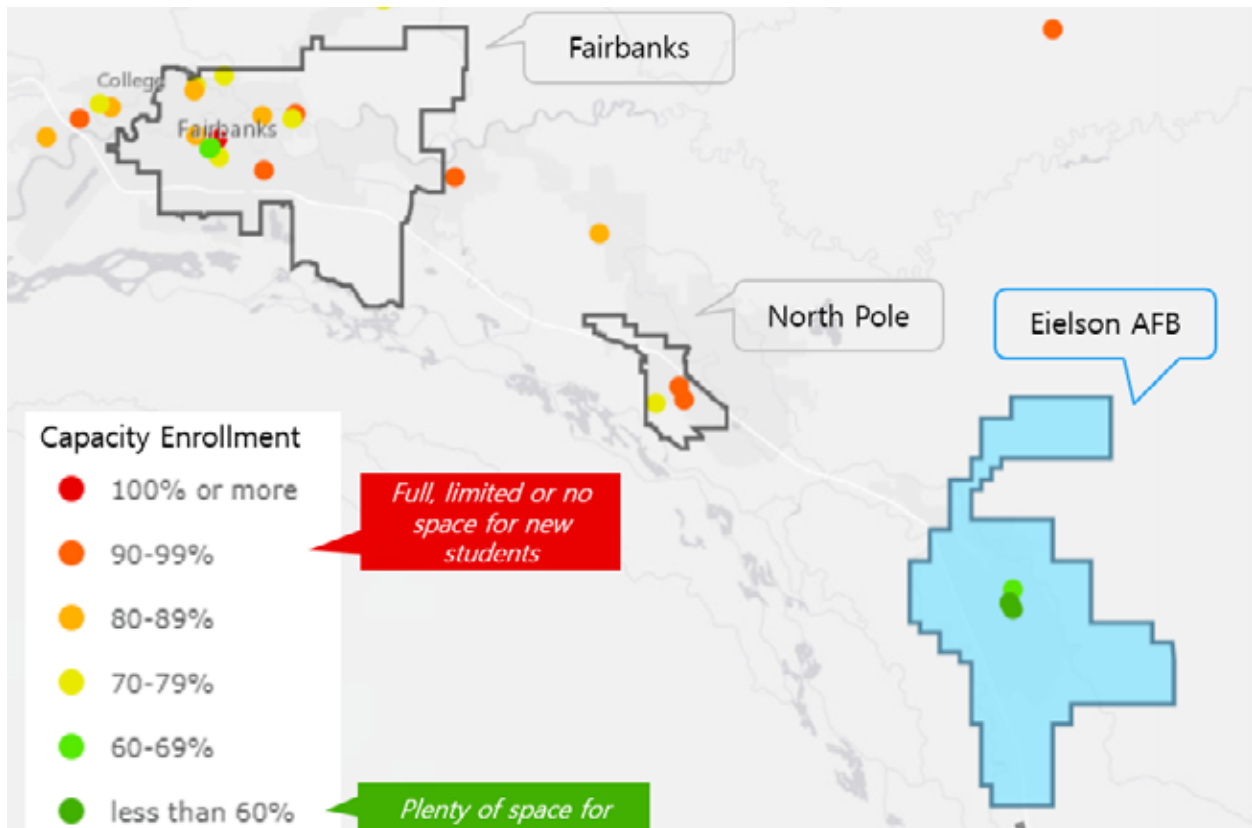


Credit: Fairbanks North Star Borough

This enrollment data can also be viewed geographically. Figure 5 is a map of the major metropolitan center of the FNSB. Each dot on the map represents the location of one of FNSB’s public schools. The color of each school’s data point indicates the capacity enrollment; schools that are red or dark orange are at or near capacity, while schools in green have the capacity to absorb more students. The boundaries of EAFB are highlighted in blue for reference. As seen on the map, EAFB

schools are all green and have sufficient capacity for new students. However, schools near EAFB are all near capacity, except for North Pole High School which is approximately 78 percent (this is the yellow dot within the City of North Pole boundaries). The remaining FNSB schools with significant capacity to absorb new students are in central and western Fairbanks, which is outside the likely commute distance of most EAFB households.

FIGURE 5: MAP OF SCHOOL LOCATIONS AND CAPACITY



Source: Map produced by Agnew::Beck with data from the FNSB School District

OVERVIEW OF THE ENROLLMENT PROCESS FOR AIR FORCE FAMILIES

Air Force families typically receive a six-month tentative notice and a finalized three-month notice of their next base assignment, at which point they start looking at schools. When a family is assigned to Eielson Air Force Base, they normally enroll their school-age children online before arrival. Ideally enrollment happens prior to the start of the school year, positioning school staff to configure class sizes and staffing accordingly. However, when students arrive mid-year, the school district can make shifts to accommodate them. An Air Force School Liaison Officer helps parents navigate the school system during the transition, and provides additional support for parents with special needs children to ensure there are sufficient programs to meet their unique needs. The Air Force aims to limit disruption for families with school-age children by aligning Permanent Change of Station (PCS) dates with holiday or summer breaks.

If a family wants to enroll their child(ren) at a school outside their location-based designated school, they need to apply for an Out of Area Attendance (OAA) waiver. Each school has the discretion to review and process applications depending on the available classroom and teacher capacity; the school then submits the approved OAA waiver list to the school district office.³ Families must re-apply for OAA acceptance each school year.

“ We have to develop projections for the upcoming year, which are used to establish our staffing plans and annual budget. If we estimate incorrectly, it impacts our budget and class sizes and we have to make last-minute adjustments, which sometimes includes moving teachers between schools. ”

- FNSBSD Administrator



Credit: Fairbanks North Star Borough

³ Schools oversee the application process and submit their approved list to the school district office. Therefore, district-level data are only available for students who have approved OAA waivers in place. In spring 2018, the FNSBSD will be moving to electronic applications; FNSBSD will then know how many students apply to attend OAA rather than just the number who are approved.

For the 2017-2018 school year, there are 305 OAA students, or students enrolled in schools other than their local school. OAA enrollment for select schools is summarized in Figure 6. A total of 155 students, half of all students with OAA waivers, are enrolled in on-base schools, likely indicating that some military families are opting to live off-base and enroll their children in on-base schools. Crawford Elementary saw the highest number of OAA waivers with 58 students during the 2017-2018

school year; this number has increased significantly from 13 in 2014-2015. A few years ago, Air Force families who lived off-base were encouraged to enroll their students in on-base schools due to low enrollment. This may account for the increases in OAA waiver counts at Anderson and Crawford; both on-base elementary schools experienced 2017-2018 OAA enrollment numbers more than four times higher than 2014-2015 numbers.

“ We live off-base and bring children on-base to go to school and they go to the youth center after school, which is very convenient. It was super easy to enroll on-base in an out of attendance area.”

“We were denied access to the on-base school.”

- Eielson AFB Focus Group Participants

FIGURE 6: NUMBER OF OUT OF ATTENDANCE AREA (OAA) STUDENTS ENROLLED AT SELECT SCHOOLS, 2014-2018

School	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	Average OAA Enrollment, '14-'15 through '17-'18
On Eielson Air Force Base					
Anderson Elementary	5	14	26	23	17
Ben Eielson Jr High* ¹	6	4	24	25	14.8
Ben Eielson Sr High* ¹	7	17	53	49	31.5
Crawford Elementary	13	47	49	58	42
Near Eielson Air Force Base					
Midnight Sun Elementary	32	23		5	20
North Pole Elementary	46	46	36	24	38
North Pole Middle* ¹	2		2		2
North Pole High* ¹		2	5		4
Salcha Elementary	1	2	4	4	3
Ticasuk Brown Elementary	15	3	3	0	5
Grand Total, Entire District (includes schools not listed above)	222	313	278	305	279.5
1. Beginning 2016-17, students applying for secondary schools were required to complete an OAA form, prior to that it was only mandatory for elementary students					

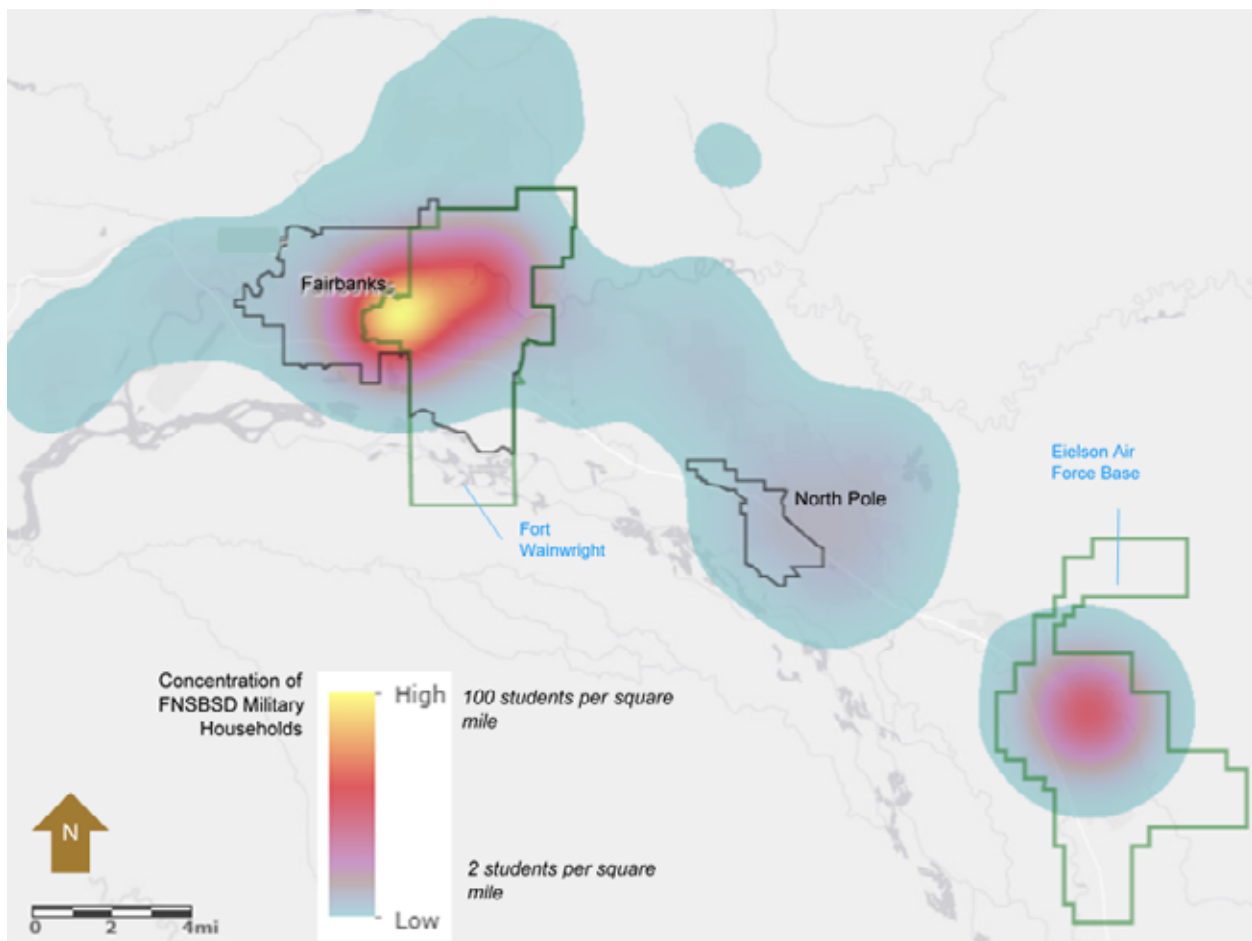
Source: FNSB School District

Military-Connected Student Enrollment Data

The FNSB School District currently educates over 3,200 military students, who make up 26 percent of the total student population.⁴ Figure 7 below shows the distribution of military households throughout the FNSB; areas with higher concentrations appear

yellow and red. Military families are concentrated in the population centers of Fairbanks and North Pole, and on the two military bases, Ft. Wainwright and Eielson Air Force Base.

FIGURE 7: DISTRIBUTION OF MILITARY-CONNECTED HOUSEHOLDS WITH STUDENTS IN FNSB



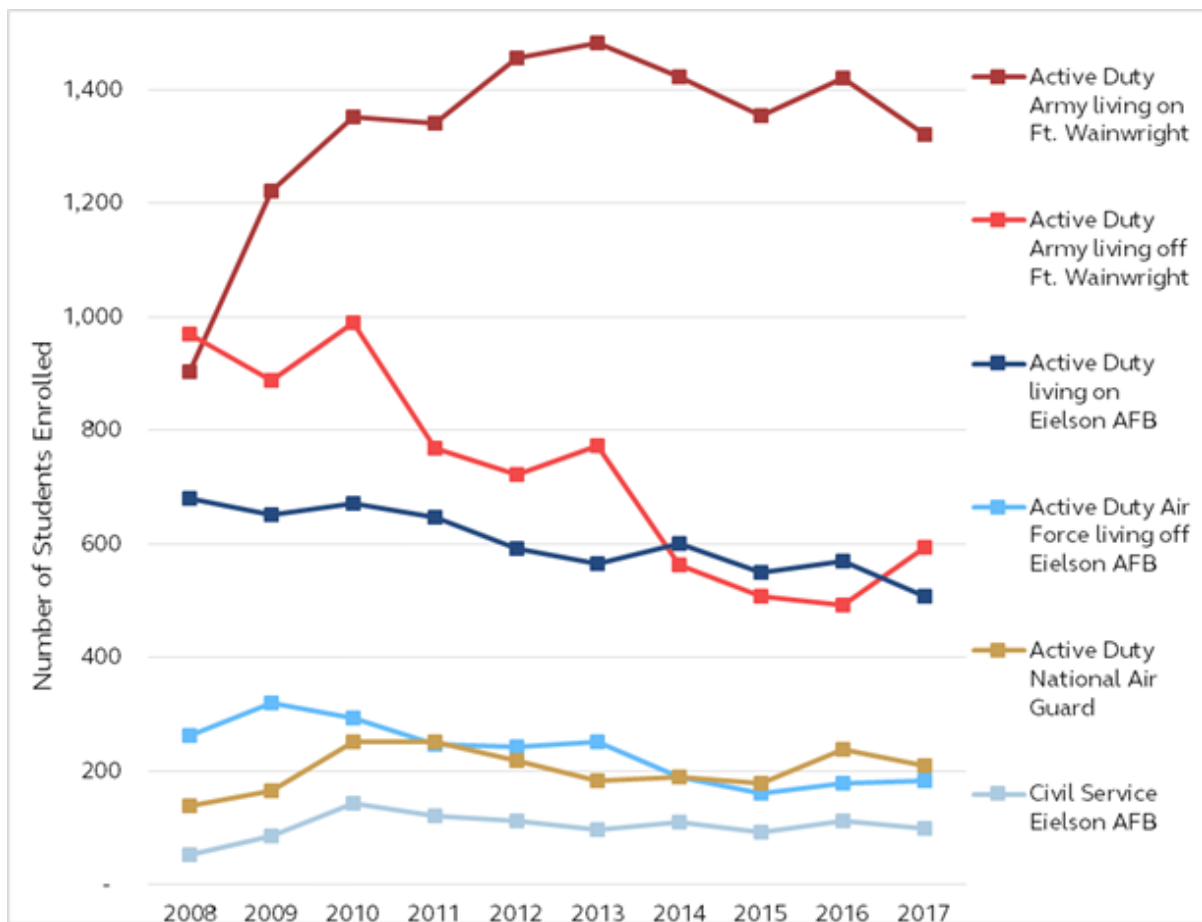
Source: Map produced by Agnew::Beck Consulting with data from the FNSB School District

⁴ Source: FNSBSD Military Student Support page, updated February 2018.

The federal government contributes money to school districts who serve families on military installations through a program called Federal Impact Aid. To track eligibility and quantity for this aid, the FNSB School District tracks data on its military-connected students using PL-874 surveys (the PL-874 name comes from the name of the congressional legislation, Public Law 874). The PL-874 data contains codes that identify the federal branch associated with a student’s family (e.g., Army, Air Force, Army Corp of Engineers, National Guard, Federal Aviation Administration) and where relevant, whether the household is located on a military installation. The database also contains information such as grade level,

military family member rank, school and more. Figure 8 shows district-wide student enrollment for military-connected students in categories with 100 or more students, with trend data over the past ten years. As shown, students in Active Duty Ft. Wainwright households make up the two largest categories, followed by Air Force families living on-base. In 2017, there were a combined 1,914 students associated with the Army installation at Ft. Wainwright (1,321 on-base and 592 off-base), while the Air Force had a combined 789 students associated with Eielson Air Force Base (508 on-base, 182 off-base and 99 with a parent in the Air Force civil service).

FIGURE 8: DISTRICT-WIDE STUDENT ENROLLMENT BY TOP MILITARY-CONNECTED CATEGORIES, 2008-2017



Source: FNSB School District

The FNSB School District collects PL-874 data on the number of military-connected students by each school. A subset of this data is shown in Figure 9. Unsurprisingly, all three of the schools on EAFB have the highest number of military students. Of the three, Crawford Elementary is lowest with approximately three out of every four students who are military-connected, while Ben Eielson Junior/Senior High is highest with almost nine out of every ten students from a military-connected household. Most of these enrollment numbers are from children in on-base households. Some non-military families who live in Moose Creek and Salcha are in the service boundary for the on-base schools.

FNSBSD also has a “school without walls” called Fairbanks Building Educational Success Together (BEST), which supports parents who want to homeschool their children using alternative programs that meet state content and performance

standards. As of the 2017-2018 school year, there are 301 students enrolled in the BEST program, including 14 Air Force-connected students. Families who opt to homeschool their children in other programs outside of the school district or through private schools are not captured in the data in this chapter.

Schools near Eielson primarily serve Air Force families who are living off-base, plus some civilians and an even smaller number of on-base Air Force households who opt to send their children to school off-base. Of the schools near EAFB, Salcha Elementary has the highest proportional air force-connected student enrollment, with nine students out of 73 (12 percent of the student body), and North Pole High has the highest total Air Force-connected enrollment with 43 students (6 percent of the student body).

FIGURE 9: NUMBER OF AIR FORCE-CONNECTED STUDENTS BY SELECT FNSB SCHOOLS, 2015-2017

	2015	2016	2017	% of students w/ military connection
Schools on EAFB				
Anderson Elementary	216	224	192	
Air Force off-base	9	7	13	81%
Air Force civil service	7	7	4	
Air Force on-base	200	210	175	
Crawford Elementary	216	227	224	
Air Force off-base	25	18	24	74%
Air Force civil service	9	9	10	
Air Force on-base	182	200	190	
Ben Eielson Junior/Senior	185	193	177	
Air Force off-base	12	20	23	88%
Air Force civil service	18	36	30	
Air Force on-base	155	137	124	
Schools near EAFB				
Midnight Sun Elementary	33	33	32	
Air Force off-base	28	29	25	7%
Air Force civil service	5	4	6	
Air Force on-base	0	0	1	

	2015	2016	2017	% of students w/ military connection
North Pole Elementary	26	26	27	
Air Force off-base	18	20	20	6%
Air Force civil service	5	2	5	
Air Force on-base	3	4	2	
North Pole High	37	44	43	
Air Force off-base	24	22	25	6%
Air Force civil service	13	20	17	
Air Force on-base	0	2	1	
North Pole Middle	30	43	33	
Air Force off-base	18	28	22	5%
Air Force civil service	11	15	10	
Air Force on-base	1	0	1	
Salcha	9	9	9	
Air Force off-base	5	4	5	12%
Air Force civil service	4	5	4	
Air Force on-base	0	0	0	
Ticasuk Brown Elementary	11	13	10	
Air Force off-base	9	13	9	
Air Force civil service	2	0	1	
Air Force on-base	0	0	0	
Grand Total	763	812	747	

Source: FNSB School District

Increases and decreases in the number of military-connected students in the FNSBSD can be dramatic from year to year and have a significant impact on overall student enrollment trends. Figure 10 shows the annual change in enrollment for the FNSBSD over the past nine years; this data is also available in graphic form in Figure 11. The annual changes are split into three categories for analysis: Air Force-connected students (navy blue), Army-connected students (medium blue) and all other students (gold). As seen in the graph, changes in military enrollment are one of the primary drivers of overall enrollment increases and decreases. For example, going into the 2008-2009 school year, the district had 297 more Army and Air Force-connected students enroll than the previous year, which offset a decline in other enrollment (loss of 196 students) for a total enrollment increase

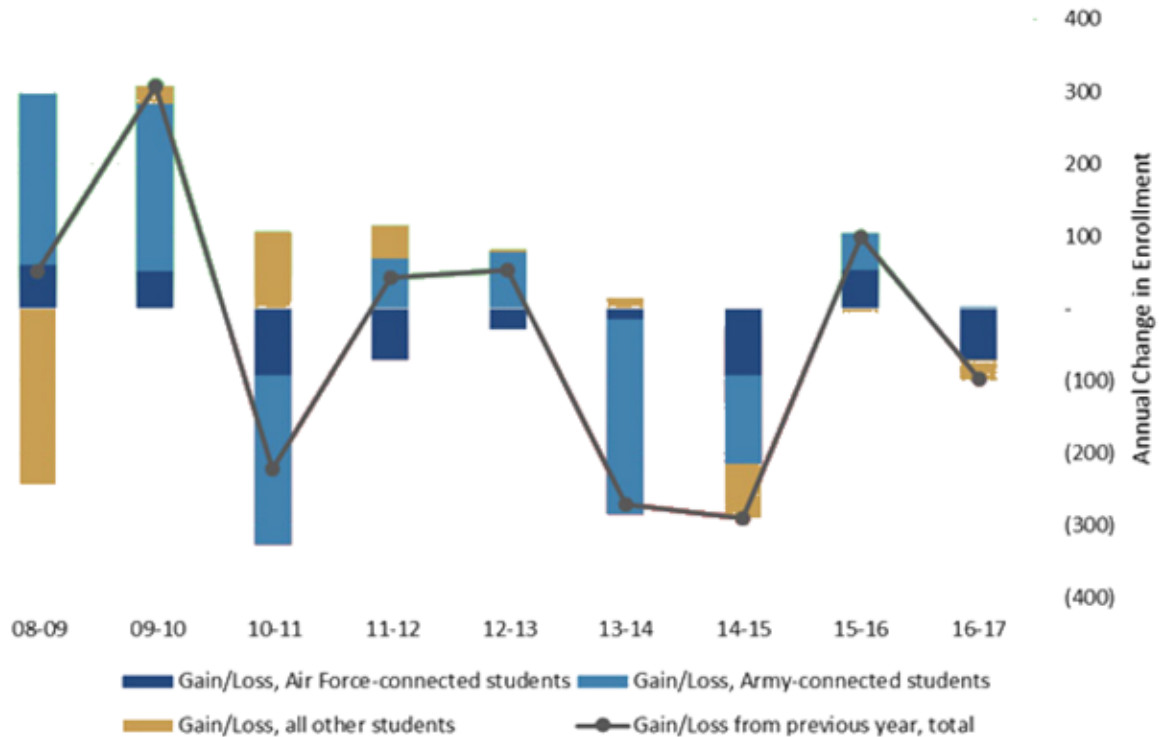
of 101. However, the 2013-2014 school year had a net loss of 280 students; 269 of those students (96 percent) were from a net loss in the number of Army-connected families who were enrolled in FNSB schools. These fluctuations can be difficult for school administrators who must coordinate enrollment and staffing needs across the district to meet changing enrollment patterns. It is also a challenge from a budgeting perspective, because the FNSBSD's proposed budget is based in part on student enrollment estimates, and uncertainty in military enrollment can result in large variations between proposed and actual budget numbers. Since changes in the number of military-connected students have such a strong impact on overall enrollment, having accurate enrollment forecasts from the military installations can help the FNSBSD prepare for and respond to these fluctuations.

FIGURE 10: ANNUAL GAINS/LOSSES IN ENROLLMENT AND COMPONENTS OF CHANGE FROM AIR FORCE AND ARMY

Year	08-09	09-10	10-11	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17
ENROLLMENT									
Total District Enrollment	14,080	14,132	14,439	14,218	14,260	14,313	14,043	13,753	13,851
Air Force Enrollment	1,056	1,107	1,015	943	914	899	807	861	789
Army Enrollment	2,110	2,342	2,108	2,177	2,255	1,986	1,863	1,913	1,914
GAINS/LOSSES									
Total change from previous year	52	307	(221)	42	53	(270)	(290)	98	(98)
Air Force-connected students	60	51	(92)	(72)	(29)	(15)	(92)	54	(72)
Army-connected students	237	232	(234)	69	78	(269)	(123)	50	1
All other students	(245)	24	105	45	4	14	(75)	(6)	(27)

Source: FNSB School District

FIGURE 11: COMPONENTS OF CHANGE: STUDENT ENROLLMENT GAINS AND LOSSES

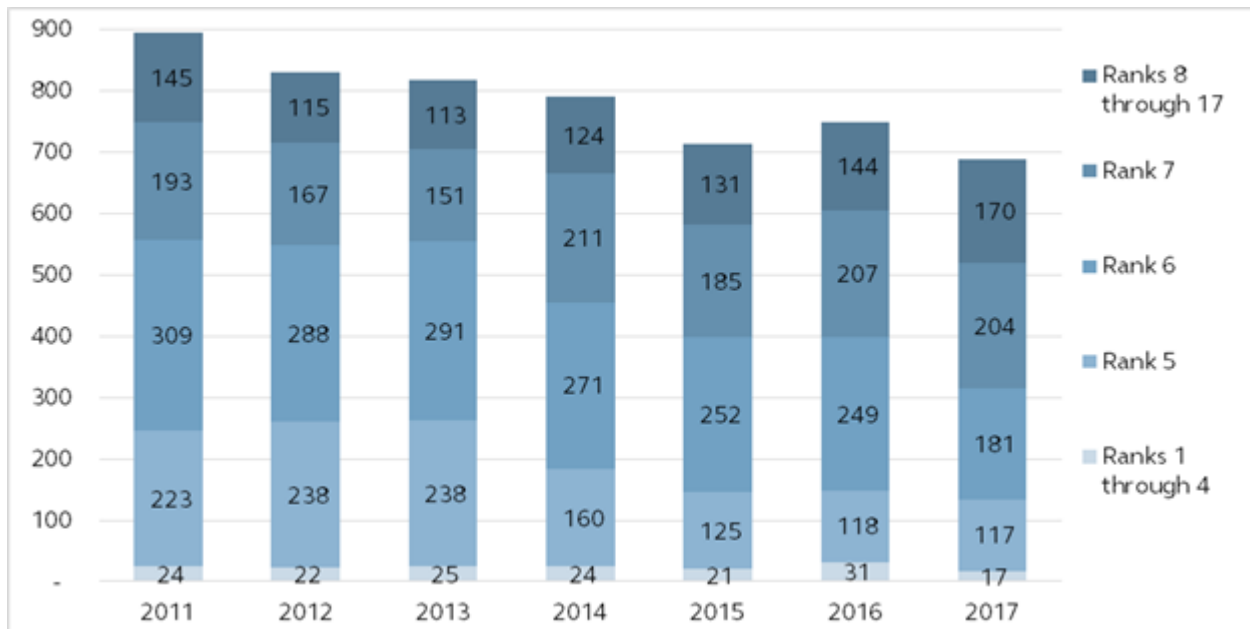


Source: FNSB School District

The FNSB School District’s PL-874 database includes the military rank of military-connected students’ parent(s) (See Figure 12). The housing stipend amount Air Force families receive is based in part on a member’s rank, so this data helps predict the housing stipend amount families will have available for renting or buying a home.

Overall, the number of Eielson-connected students dropped between 2011 and 2017; however, the number of students with parents at higher rank levels is increasing. For example, in 2011 the percentage of students with parents at a rank of 7 or higher was 38 percent, which steadily increased to 54 percent in 2017.

FIGURE 12: NUMBER OF EIELSON-CONNECTED STUDENTS ENROLLED IN FNSB SCHOOLS BY MILITARY FAMILY RANK LEVEL, 2011-2017⁵



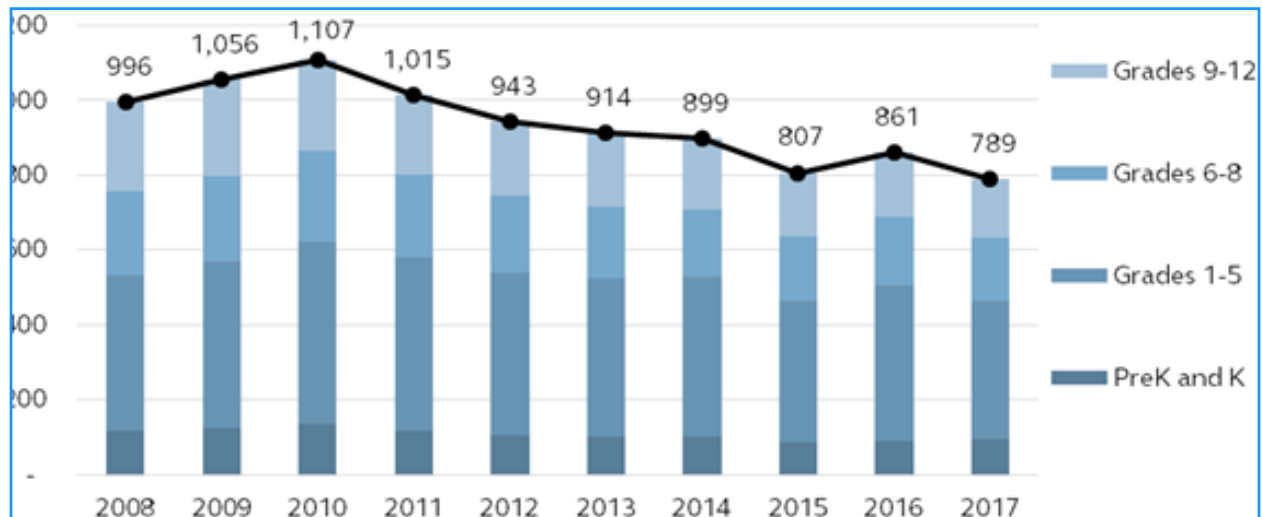
Source: FNSB School District

⁵ In this case, “Eielson-connected” includes the following PL-874 Categories: EAFB (Active Duty living on Eielson Air Force Base), FTWWEAFB (Active Duty living on Ft. Wainwright and working on Eielson), EAFBFTWW (Active Duty living on Eielson and working on Ft. Wainwright), AIR FORCE (Active Duty Air Force living off-base)

During the planning process, FNSB School District administrative staff indicated they would like to know the estimated number of children by grade who will likely be enrolling in the school district as a result of the F-35 beddown. Unfortunately, exact enrollment by grade is not available because the specific families arriving at EAFB are not yet known and that information is not typically made available by the Air Force prior to the arrival of

new households. However, we can look at current and historical trends to see if enrollment by grade differs for military-connected students than the overall student body. Enrollment by grade level groups are shown below for the subset of Eielson-connected students (Figure 13). As the figures show, the distribution of students by grade level has remained constant over the past ten years, even with slight fluctuations in overall enrollment trends.

FIGURE 13: ENROLLMENT BY AGE GROUP, EIELSON-CONNECTED STUDENTS, 2008-2017

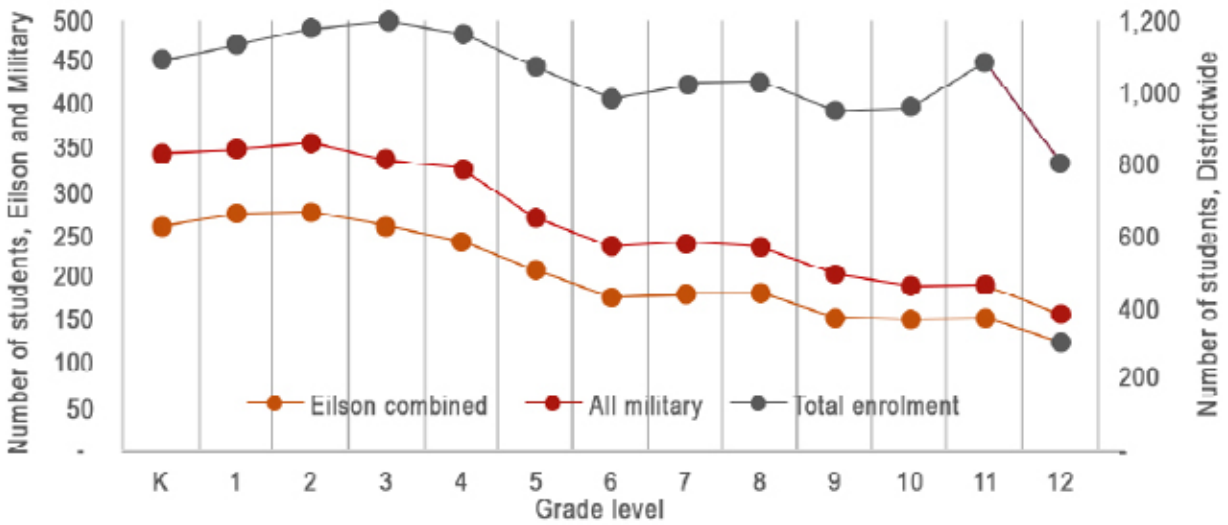


Source: FNSB School District

Figure 14 shows a one-year snapshot of the proportion of Eielson-connected and military-connected students enrolled in each grade compared with grade enrollment for the entire district. The military and Eielson-connected students show a similar distribution across grade levels when compared with the district-wide numbers. In all categories, there are more students in elementary school grades than middle school grades, and more students in middle school

grades than in high school grades. There is only one outlying category in the data: a spike in the number of 11th grade students enrolled in the FNSB District in 2017. Both the year-to-year historic trends and the current breakout by grade level indicate that assuming the incoming military-connected students will follow historic grade-level distribution trends for military and Eielson-connected families, student increases will likely be in proportion to current enrollment by grade levels.

FIGURE 14: DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENTS BY GRADE, 2017



Source: FNSB School District

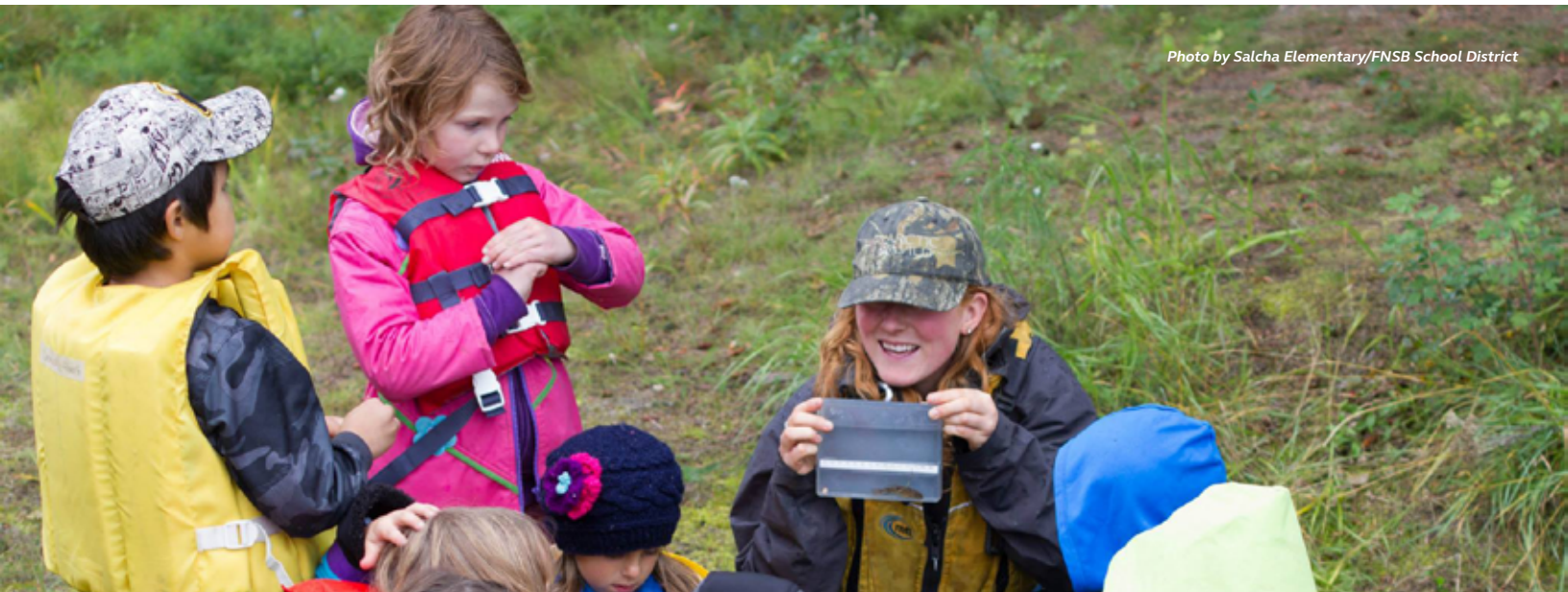


Photo by Salcha Elementary/FNSB School District

School Quality

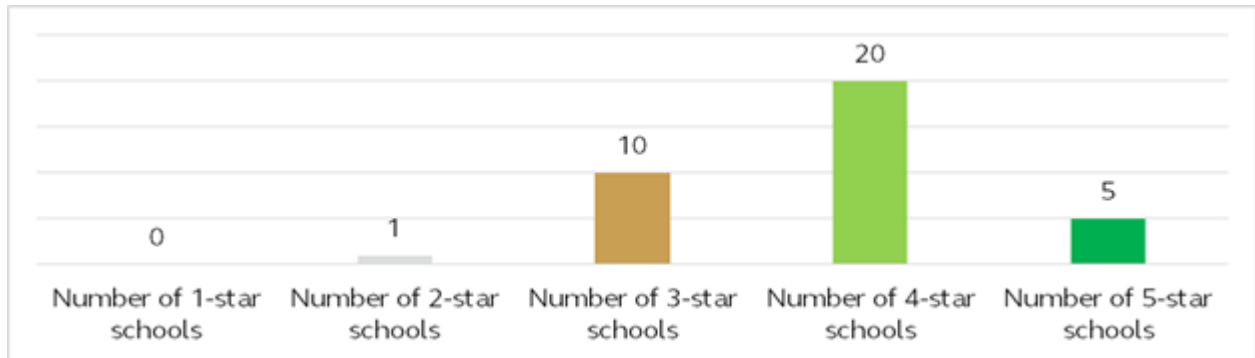
When selecting a place to live, Air Force families with school-age children take into account the quality and programming of local schools. School satisfaction also contributes to the quality of Air Force families’ experiences during their time stationed at Eielson. The State of Alaska develops report cards for each school and district to track performance and progress based on a series of measures including the qualification level of teachers, attendance rates, graduation rates, dropout rates and student test scores. The report cards include an Alaska School Performance Index (ASPI) score. The State is in the process of changing the assessment methodology so the most current scores are from the 2013-2014 school

year. Under ASPI, each school is assigned a score on a 100-point scale and given a star rating from 1 (lowest) to 5 (best). Figure 15 shows the number of FNSB schools scoring at each level. More than half the FNSB schools are at a 4-star level, with five schools at the 5-star level, 10 schools at the 3-star level and one school (Star of the North) at the 2-star level. The FNSB School District does not have any 1-star schools.

“ Most teachers here are flexible and work well with Eielson students. They help with the new school transition. ”

-EAFB School Liaison

FIGURE 15: NUMBER OF FNSB SCHOOLS BY ASPI SCORE, 2013-2014 SCHOOL YEAR



Source: FNSB School District

FIGURE 16: ASPI SCORES FOR SELECT SCHOOLS ON AND NEAR EIELSON, 2013-2014 SCHOOL YEAR

On Eielson Air Force Base	Score	Near Eielson Air Force Base	Score
Anderson Elementary (K-2)	95.35	Midnight Sun Elementary	89.70
Crawford Elementary (3-6)	95.35	North Pole Elementary	89.88
Ben Eielson Junior/Senior High	86.39	Salcha Elementary	96.81
		Tikasuk Brown Elementary	87.10
		North Pole Middle	89.93
		North Pole High	77.20
Source: FNSB School District			

Source: FNSB School District

Scores for schools on and near EAFB are shown in Figure 16. Both elementary schools on EAFB are 5-star schools, and Eielson Junior/Senior High is a 4-star. In North Pole, the elementary and middle school are both scored as 4-stars; the high school is the lowest in the area with 3 stars. Salcha Elementary is a five-star school. When compared with the 2011-2012 school year, three of these schools have achieved significant gains in their scores, with North Pole Middle Elementary and North Pole Middle School both moving up one star level (from 3 to 4-star) and Salcha moving up two star levels (from a 3 to a 5-star).

During the Eielson Regional Growth Plan process, residents and Air Force families have shared a variety of feedback, insights and perspectives on the quality of local schools. Overall, parents are satisfied with FNSBSD elementary schools. However, parents expressed mixed results for middle and high schools.

According to reports and surveys from Blue Star Families and reinforced in focus groups with current Eielson Air Force families, schools are a significant factor for many military families with children when selecting a place to live. When selecting a school, parents consider the following:

- School quality as based on performance scores, classroom size, etc.
- Availability of social and emotional supports for military families
- Location
- Specific programming such as special education and after-school activities and sports
- Maintaining continuity of curriculum from previous school

“ We live off-base and bring our children on-base to go to school. They go to the youth center after school, which is very convenient. ”

-Eielson AFB Focus Group
Participant

The District supports multiple programs and partnerships that assist military families and their children. The FNSBSD currently receives three grants funded through the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) that serve military-connected students:

Basic Training 1:1

- **Timing:** 2015 - 2019
- **Funding Amount:** \$1.5 million
- **Description:** this program seeks to improve academic outcomes for students in military families throughout the school district by working with the district’s youngest cohorts of military-connected students. The program focuses on students at five of the district’s most military-oriented elementary schools: Ladd, Anderson, Crawford, Arctic Light and Midnight Sun. The grant covers funding for a one-to-one iPad initiative for grades one through three and a coordinator who provides professional development to teachers at the participating schools.

Project D.I.P.L.O.M.A.S.
(Developing Innovative Personalized Learning Opportunities Maximizing the Achievement of Students)

- Timing: September 25, 2017 – March 24, 2022
- Funding Amount: \$1 million
- Description: this grant supports the implementation of personalized learning at five secondary schools with high military-connected enrollment: Ben Eielson Junior/Senior High School, North Pole Middle School, North Pole High School, Tanana Middle School and Lathrop High School.

Project 360

- Timing: August 1, 2016 – July 31, 2021
- Funding Amount: \$1.5 million
- Description: this grant aims to increase social-emotional supports for transitioning and at-risk students at ten target schools while providing the staff who serve these students with sustained and embedded professional development to remove barriers to student success and enable ongoing student growth.

These programs support both Army and Air Force families throughout the FNSB.



Photo by Ben Eielson High School/FNSB School District

CHILD CARE

Demand and Availability of Child Care in FNSB

This section assesses the need for and availability of child care resources in the FNSB. The analysis generally focuses on child care for pre-school-age children (typically under six years of age), although child care can include services for children under 13 years of age. Alaska has approximately 81,482 families with children, including 26,522 single parent families and 22,395 families with two parents in the labor force who have children under the age of six.⁶ Child Care Aware of America estimates there are 39,348 children under the age of six who potentially need child care in Alaska, while there are 29,513 spaces available in child care programs.⁷ This includes 253 center-based child care programs, 554 family child care homes, 68 school-aged care programs and a smaller subset of other programs. Only eight percent of center-based child care programs are nationally accredited in Alaska, and none of the family child care homes are nationally accredited; this is likely because state licensing standards do not align with federal standards and the national accreditation requirements are expensive and difficult to obtain.

The Alaska Child Care Program Office conducted a 2015 statewide survey of child care providers. Figure 17 provides an overview of some of the results for the Fairbanks Region, an area defined by FNSB boundaries. In the Fairbanks Region, 63 out of approximately 75 child care providers responded to the survey, an estimated 84 percent response rate. Of those who responded, 24 were licensed centers, 23 were licensed group homes and 16 were licensed homes. Overall, 52 percent of providers are operating at licensed capacity. Top reasons for not operating at full capacity were lack of enrolled

children (77 percent), lack of child care staff (10 percent), and not wanting to operate at full capacity (10 percent).

What are the types of licensed child care providers in Alaska?

Licensed Child Care Centers

- 13 or more children
- 243 centers in Alaska, with 4,549 staff

Licensed Child Care Group Homes

- 9 to 12 children at one time.
- 83 homes in Alaska, with 373 staff

Licensed Child Care Homes

- Up to eight children at one time
- 291 homes in Alaska, with 543 staff

Source: McDowell Group: Economic Impact of Early Care and Learning in Alaska, October 2015

⁶ Based on American Community Survey Five-Year Averages, 2011-2015, as reported in the 2017 State Child Care Facts in the State of Alaska handout by Child Care Aware of America. Available here: http://usa.childcareaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/AK_Facts.pdf

⁷ Data comes from on Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies for Child Care Aware® of America's 2017 State Fact Sheet Survey. Data reflects the 2016 calendar year.

FIGURE 17: CHILD CARE PROVIDER TYPE, CAPACITY AND WAITLISTS IN THE FNSB, 2015

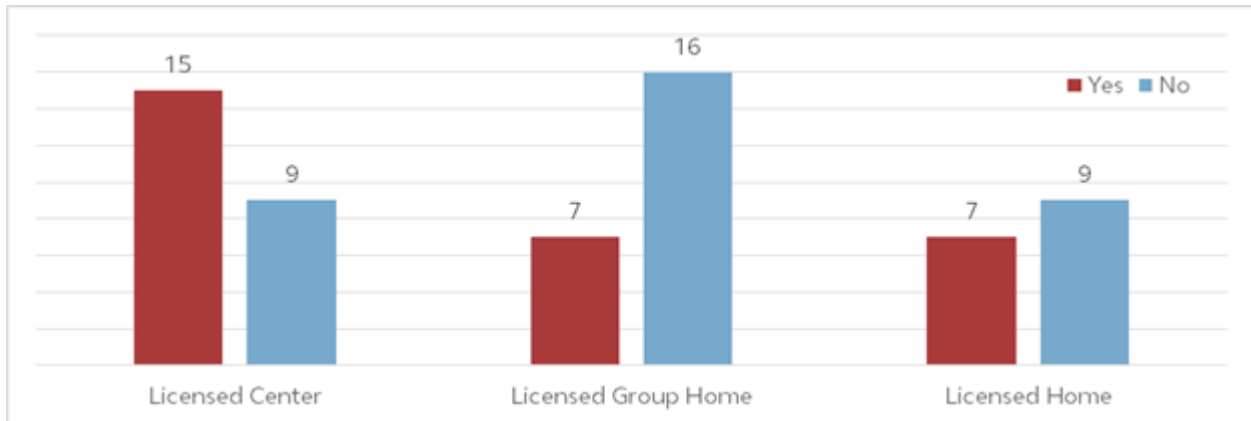
Number of Licensed Providers in FNSB		
Provider Type	Number of Respondents	% of Respondents Operating at Full Capacity
Licensed Center	24	46%
Licensed Group Home	23	61%
Licensed Home	16	50%
Total Respondents*	63	52%
*The Fairbanks region had an 84 percent response rate, indicating 12 providers did not respond and are not included in the data		
Number of Children in Licensed Child Care		
Age Group	Children in Child Care	Children on Waiting List**
Infant Care Birth - 18 months	185	322
Toddler Care 19 months - 36 months	171	267
Preschool Age Care 37 months - 6 years	922	373
School Age Care 7 years - 12 years	333	77
**Children can be on more than one waiting list, so there may be some duplicate counts in this column		
Source: 2015 Alaska Child Care Market Price Survey Report, prepared in 2015 by the Alaska Child Program Office. Available here: http://dhss.alaska.gov/dpa/Documents/dpa/programs/ccare/Documents/Resources-Reports/2015-Alaska-Child-Care-Market-Price-Survey-Report.pdf		

The survey also asked providers about their waiting list counts (see Figure 18). Twenty-nine of the 63 responding providers have active waiting lists. Children may be listed on more than one waiting list for different providers, so these numbers may overestimate the number. Preschool age children are the largest category on the waiting list with 373 children, followed by infants with 322 on the waiting list. While the actual count is smaller, the number of infants on waiting lists is 75 percent higher than the number of infant children currently served by FNSB providers, indicating there is a disproportionate shortage of space for infants. This reinforces perspectives shared by stakeholders that there is a shortage of infant and preschool age care options in the community.

“ Our baby was on the waiting list for child care since before she was born, and she is almost 12 months old. ”

-Eielson AFB Focus Group Participant

FIGURE 18: NUMBER OF FNSB LICENSED PROVIDERS WITH WAITING LISTS



Source: 2015 Alaska Child Care Market Price Survey Report, by the Alaska Child Program Office



In addition to the lack of available capacity for child care in FNSB, many families struggle with the high costs of care. According to Child Care Aware, on average child care in Alaska costs 10-12 percent of household median income. For a household with both an infant and a 4-year old, the annual costs are \$22,464 for a center and \$19,746 for a licensed in-home provider; this equates to 64-73 percent of the total income of a married family living at the poverty line.

Child Care Resources on Eielson Air Force Base

Eielson has a Child Development Center that offers care for children between the ages of six weeks to five years old, with recreational and educational programming based on the Air Force Creative Curriculum. The Child Development Center has 113 children enrolled, with a waiting list of about 13 children. The number on the waiting list has dropped significantly over the past few months; at its peak, the list included over 100 children. The total facility capacity is 206 children but is not fully staffed due to a shortage of personnel. In recent years as families have departed Eielson through Permanent Change of Station (PCS), many child care providers have left and incoming dependents have demonstrated less interest in working in the child care field. EAFB has been undergoing significant outreach campaigns on-base to recruit additional staff to expand capacity at the Center; however, this is a slow process, and can take six months or more for new staff to be “cleared.” Staff turnover remains an ongoing struggle, since individuals are only stationed at EAFB for a few years. According to Air Force staff, individuals who live off-base generally do not apply for positions at the Center, possibly because the Center’s wages are not competitive with other job opportunities in the North Pole and Fairbanks area.

Eielson also has a Family Child Care Office which offers provider training and helps families identify child care options on-base. The website: www.militarychildcare.com contains a database of certified child care providers and lets military families search and connect with potential providers. Air Force in-home providers do not need to be accredited to become certified to provide care, but they must go through intensive training and once open, they receive monthly inspection visits from EAFB Family Child Care office staff. Due to the real and perceived costs of becoming a certified in-home provider, some families choose to set up informal agreements and reciprocal child care plans with neighbors and friends, and other parents opt to work from home. As of December 2017, there are three in-home providers on-base and one in North Pole. This is up from only one provider in September, with one more currently going through the certification process. These in-home providers may care for up to six children, including their own, with no more than two children under the age of two.

For school-age children, Eielson has the School Age Center, which offers before and after school care and full day care on days the local schools are not in session. All children enrolled in on-base schools are eligible for services at the School Age Center, including families living on and off-base. Approximately 20 percent of on-base EAFB families utilize the services at the School Age Center. EAFB child and youth services staff conducted an analysis to forecast future capacity needs and found the current School Age Center lacks the capacity to absorb the anticipated increase of children from the F-35 Beddown. As a result, the Air Force is in the design phases to construct a new, \$22.6 million replacement facility, projected to open in 2021 with a capacity for 240 school age children. The current facility, which was originally scheduled to be removed in 2008, will be demolished.

The Air Force also has child care fee assistance available for use with off-base providers. The program is managed by Child Care Aware of America. Active Duty Air Force households may use the fee assistance when on-base child care is not an available or viable option. Families living within 15 miles or 20 minutes of on-base child care must be on the Child Development Center wait list before applying for assistance. Subsidy amounts are based on total family income of eligible families, and monthly payments are provided directly to the care provider. Air Force households are only allowed to use military subsidies for off-base child care with providers who meet national accreditation standards. The accreditation indicates a program meets strict criteria and offers high quality child care. The standards are stricter than Alaska's state licensing requirements; as a result, most licensed community providers are not eligible for the military subsidy.

Statewide Child Care Resources

The State of Alaska oversees a Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), which provides financial assistance on a sliding fee scale for child care expenses for eligible families who are working or participating in an education/training program. Military families are eligible to participate in the program. The subsidy can only be used with eligible care providers who meet the minimum licensing requirements, and payments go directly to the child care provider. Subsidies can also be applied for on-base child care programs. Thread is responsible for service delivery in Alaska's northern region, which includes the FNSB. The program was recently updated, with revised eligibility requirements and rates effective on October 1, 2017. The changes include an updated family income and contribution schedule, and now offers benefits for households up to 85 percent of state median income, instead

of the previous cap of 75 percent. Rates were also updated to more closely match market prices. During the month of October 2017, 320 children across 209 families were authorized to use CCAP funds in the Fairbanks region; providers receiving the subsidies included 29 licensed centers, 31 group homes and 19 homes.⁸ On October 2017, none of the CCAP funds went to military-sponsored centers or military homes in the Fairbanks region; however, interviews with EAFB child and youth services staff indicate that some Air Force families do utilize these programs from time to time. According to correspondence with the research unit of the State's Child Care Assistance Program, there is one military-affiliated family in the northern region currently receiving child care assistance.

Thread also oversees Alaska's Quality Recognition and Improvement System (QRIS), called Learn & Grow. QRIS is a



method to assess and communicate the level of quality in early child care and education settings to help providers become higher quality and to help families make educated decisions when selecting a provider. QRIS networks are being established all over the country and exist in some form in every state except Mississippi. Alaska's Learn & Grow resources include technical assistance, professional development funding and quality improvement grants. The program began in July 2016 and is still being built up in Alaska, with implementation happening in phases. As of mid-2017, only 8.2 percent of all available child care slots belong to programs participating in QRIS. Ultimately Learn & Grow will offer five levels of quality benchmarks, with a framework for each

⁸ Child Care Services Monthly Report, September 2017. Published by the Alaska Department of Health & Social Services, Division of Public Assistance, Child Care Program Office.

level for different categories of providers. Currently there are training programs in place for levels one and two, and level three is in development. QRIS level five will be the equivalent of the national accreditation standards required for Air Force fee assistance. Achieving level five requires significant

training time and investment; once all five levels of QRIS have been defined in Alaska, providers may still choose not to pursue this level of accreditation unless external or supplementary funding is available.

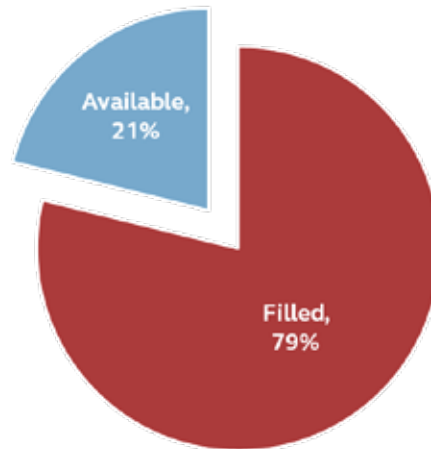
ESTIMATED GAPS – WHAT ARE THE GAPS BETWEEN NEEDS AND EXISTING PROGRAMS, SERVICES, INFRASTRUCTURE?

Schools

Enrollment and Capacity

During the 2016-2017 school year, the FNSB School District was at 79 percent capacity overall based on total facility capacity, with the ability to absorb up to 3,387 additional students (Figure 19). At a glance, it appears the district should easily absorb the projected 1,204 additional school-age individuals under the age of 17 expected to be in the FNSB by 2030 as a result of the F-35 Beddown and related growth. However, capacity varies for each school, and some of the schools closest to EAFB are already at or near capacity. This includes Salcha Elementary (96 percent capacity), North Pole Elementary (99 percent capacity), Midnight Sun Elementary (89 percent capacity), Tikasuk Brown Elementary (90 percent capacity) and North Pole Middle School (96 percent capacity).

FIGURE 19: FNSB SCHOOL DISTRICT CAPACITY



Source: FNSB School District

FIGURE 20: CAPACITY OF FNSBSD SCHOOLS TO SUPPORT INCOMING YOUTH POPULATION

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Elementary: ages 5-10 (grades K-5)													
A. Projected total student population increase/decrease	17	99	289	592	727	845	940	1,010	1,064	1,052	1,046	1,028	1,008
B. Number of new students likely enrolling in EAFB-area public schools (80% of A)	13	79	231	473	582	676	752	808	851	842	837	822	807
C. Total available capacity, elementary schools (Anderson, Crawford, Midnight Sun, North Pole, Ticasuk Brown, Salcha)	509	509	509	509	509	509	509	509	509	509	509	509	509
Total projected available capacity, EAFB-area elementary schools (C-B)	496	430	278	36	-73	-167	-243	-299	-342	-333	-328	-313	-298
Middle: ages 11-13 (grades 6-8)													
A. Projected total student population increase/decrease	10	52	116	198	241	246	267	264	285	368	443	522	523
B. Number of new students likely enrolling in EAFB-area public schools (80% of A)	8	41	93	158	193	197	214	211	228	294	354	418	418
C. Total available capacity, middle schools (North Pole Middle, Ben Eielson Jr/Sr High)	118	118	118	118	118	118	118	118	118	118	118	118	118
Total available capacity, EAFB-area middle schools (C-B)	109	76	24	-41	-75	-79	-96	-94	-111	-176	-237	-300	-301
High: ages 14-17 (grades 9-12)													
A. Projected total student population increase/decrease	-45	-25	51	140	178	193	193	218	213	227	244	240	339
B. Number of new students likely enrolling in EAFB-area public schools (80% of A)	-36	-20	41	112	142	155	155	174	170	181	195	192	271
C. Total available capacity, high schools (North Pole High, Ben Eielson Jr/Sr High)	397	397	397	397	397	397	397	397	397	397	397	397	397
Total available capacity, EAFB-area high schools (C-B)	434	417	357	285	255	243	243	223	227	216	202	205	127
A. Combined population increase/decrease	-19	126	456	930	1,146	1,284	1,400	1,492	1,562	1,646	1,733	1,791	1,870
B. Number of new students likely enrolling in EAFB-area public schools (80% of A)	-15	101	365	744	916	1,027	1,120	1,193	1,250	1,317	1,386	1,433	1,496
C. Total available capacity, all EAFB-area schools (based on 2016 capacity)	1,024	1,024	1,024	1,024	1,024	1,024	1,024	1,024	1,024	1,024	1,024	1,024	1,024
Total available capacity, all EAFB-area schools (C-B)	1,039	923	659	280	108	-3	-96	-169	-226	-293	-362	-409	-472

Source and Methodology:

- A. Projected total student increase/decrease combines two numbers from the Alaska REMI Model projections; a) 100 percent of F-35 Beddown induced growth for the selected age group, and b) 25 percent of baseline population growth, since enrollment in Eielson-area schools represents approximately 25 percent of total district enrollment.
- B. Approximately 80 percent of school-age youth are enrolled in FNSBSD schools; the others are in private/correspondence schools or not attending school.
- C. School capacity comes from the FNSBSD and is based on availability to accept additional students during the 2016-2017 school year based on total facility capacity and current enrollment at each school. The calculation assumes 1/3 of Eielson Junior/Senior High capacity is available for middle school and 2/3 for high school.

Figure 20 compares the available capacity of select FNSBSD schools with the projected population increases by age cohort from 2018 to 2025. The capacity numbers are from the 2016-2017 school year and consider the total capacity of each school, minus existing enrollment. The same baseline capacity numbers are used for all projection years. These calculations are not intended to be exact but provide some preliminary insights into the ability of elementary, middle and high schools to absorb additional students.

Overall, schools in the project area have capacity for an additional 1,024 students based on 2016 capacity, with space for 509 at the elementary level, 118 at the middle school level and 397 at the high school level. The estimated student increases take into account F-35 Beddown related growth, baseline population increases/decreases, and percentage of school-age youth who are enrolled in FNSBSD public schools. When comparing capacity with forecasted age group population increases, the high schools in the project area have

sufficient capacity to absorb the increase. However, at the elementary school level, the enrollment projections exceed capacity in year 2022, while the enrollment projections exceed capacity for middle schools starting in year 2021. These calculations assume schools max out at 100 percent capacity, although schools are often able to absorb some additional growth through the use of portable classrooms and other techniques.

In general, on-base schools have more capacity to meet the needs of the incoming population – they are between 54 and 65 percent capacity and have combined space for an additional 665 students before reaching full capacity. This could help alleviate some of the burden on the schools surrounding the base. If families opt to live off-base and enroll their children on-base, they must provide transportation, which may be a challenge for some families depending on deployments, shift hours, etc.

This chapter focuses primarily on the capacity and use of public schools for accommodating the additional increase in the number of school age children associated with the F-35 beddown. However, some parents opt to send their children to private schools and/or homeschool their children. One potential additional resource that could help absorb some of the additional student capacity is a proposed K-8 charter school in North Pole, called Discovery Peak Charter School, which is pending approval by the FNSB Board of Education and the statewide school board. The proposed school would open in fall 2019 and enroll 198 students.⁹

⁹ Source: Fairbanks Daily News-Miner. “K-8 Charter School planned for North Pole.” April 19, 2018. Available here: http://www.newsminer.com/news/local_news/k--charter-school-planned-for-north-pole/article_659a91ba-42e1-11e8-b8cc-9ffd368b5f1d.html



Photos by FNSB School District



Bus Transportation¹⁰

Bus transportation is provided for students who live at least 1.5 miles from the school. About half of total enrollment, or 7,000 students, ride the bus to school. If a family opts to enroll their students in an out-of-attendance area, transportation is not provided, and parents are responsible for bringing their child(ren) to school. Bus transportation is provided through a contract with First Student, a bus transportation company based in Ohio that operates nationwide; the district is in year two of a five-year contract.

In recent years, the school district has been plagued with late buses and unreliable service due to a lack of bus drivers, coinciding with a nationwide shortage of bus drivers. For example, on the first day of the first full week of the 2017-2018 school year, 27 of the district's 137 bus routes – or one in five buses – were late. Parents are dissatisfied with the unpredictability of service and poor communication when buses are running late.

First Student has responded to the shortage using various techniques, including combining routes and bringing drivers from out-of-state, but the lack of reliability remains an issue. The existing number of drivers slimly covers the district's daily routes. When there are problems such as drivers out ill or inclement weather, major delays occur due to a shortage of standby drivers.

According to an overview of current and target staffing provided by the FNSB School District Transportation Coordinator, summarized in Figure 21, there is a total shortage of three drivers, and at least six routes are unfilled. However, there are 14 drivers who are not currently assigned to a route. Some of the unassigned drivers have struggled to provide coverage for unfilled routes because they are unfamiliar with the area and/or winter driving conditions; it is unclear why these drivers have not been assigned to permanent routes. The North Pole area has been hit the hardest, with four open routes.

¹⁰ Information in this section comes from Fairbanks Daily News-Miner articles published on August 23rd, 2017 and September 3, 2017, plus supplemental information from the FNSB School District Transportation Coordinator.



FIGURE 21: OVERVIEW OF BUSING CHALLENGES AND STAFFING

	Routes	Total Drivers	Composition of Driver Positions
Ideal/target staffing	137	151	137 Regular drivers 14 Standby drivers (target is 10%) 0 Unassigned drivers
Current staffing with condensed routes	129	148	123 Regular drivers 11 Standby drivers 14 Unassigned drivers
Source: FNSB School District Transportation Coordinator			

A series of barriers make it difficult to hire reliable drivers. Extensive employment requirements may limit the ability to hire new drivers include the need to pass a background check, drug test, take a three-week training course and obtain a Commercial Driver's License (CDL). There are other CDL job openings in the area that offer better pay, so bus driving positions are not always competitive. Drivers also need to work well with students and manage behavior on a bus. Finally, absenteeism contributes to staffing challenges, and frequent absences put additional strain on the ability of First Student to adequately fill routes.

While the reliability of school buses is a challenge for students, parents and teachers, fortunately the increased number of F-35 Beddown-related students is unlikely to further exacerbate the situation. Current school bus routes have almost 50 percent additional capacity available for more students, so most of the new students will be absorbed by the existing route map. However, addressing the reliability of bus transportation will be critical to ensure incoming students are able to get to school on time and to maintain satisfaction levels for Air Force and local resident families alike.

Course Offerings and Extracurricular Programs

Eielson parents who participated in a set of focus groups indicate they are generally satisfied with the community's elementary schools, but have mixed opinions on the local middle and high schools. According to focus group parents, the secondary schools are large and have limited class offerings, especially for higher performing students. For example, North Pole High School does not offer Advanced Placement (AP) courses or a robotics team and has limited foreign language class offerings.

Families who participated in focus groups say they appreciate the benefits and resources associated with the military support grants, including the technology purchases and the additional counseling options. However, parents acknowledge many of the teachers lack military affiliation and could use additional military-specific training, especially for dealing with behavioral challenges.

Parents also expressed frustration with limited before and after school options at some schools such as Salcha Elementary and North Pole Elementary. This can be a challenge for working parents who struggle to find child care during the gaps between work hours and school hours.

Timing of Student Arrivals

In an ideal setting, the FNSB School District knows by mid-spring the estimated enrollment numbers for each school for the upcoming fall so they have sufficient time to adjust district boundaries, staffing distribution, bus routes, class lists and other variables to most efficiently and effectively distribute students and resources. However, military families sometimes transition mid-year and/or may not have sufficient time to enroll their students until close to or at the start of the school year. This creates challenges for administrators who need to accommodate last-minute additions.

Transitioning from Other Districts

A group of Eielson-connected parents offered a summary of education suggestions and concerns during a focus group in October 2017. Parents expressed some frustration with testing for different programs, including the extended learning program (ELP) for gifted and talented students, which required students to re-test after arriving in Alaska even if they had previously tested in another state. Some parents also shared they feel some of the Alaska performance standards are lower than districts from other station locations, and have concerns about their children falling behind and struggling to catch up after a move to another district with different standards.

Supporting Military Families in Off-Base Schools

Military families who opt to live and enroll children off-base experience a variety of hurdles to staying involved on-base. According to focus group participants, many military family events that occur at the chapel and youth center on-base happen immediately after the on-base school day ends,

which is an hour before students at off-base schools are released (excluding travel time to the base). This makes it difficult for military families with children enrolled off-base to participate in these family activities.

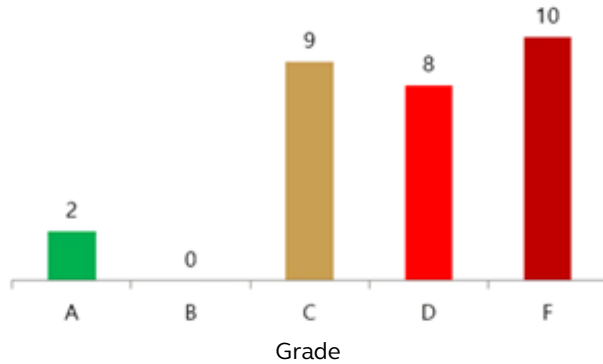
According to Eielson focus group participants, parent engagement at off-base schools is low. Teachers, students and parents could benefit from increased volunteering from military families; schools and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) may want to explore ways to make schools more welcoming and inviting for military parents to engage and participate in school activities.

CHILD CARE

Shortage of Child Care Providers

Conversations with stakeholders throughout FNSB indicate a lack of affordable child care for families with young children. Eielson families were asked about their level of satisfaction with access to child care during a series of project focus groups (results are in Figure 23). Out of a group of 29 EAFB participants, all but two respondents ranked their level of satisfaction with access to child care as a grade C or lower; the option with the highest selections was grade F. According to the nonprofit Thread, quality and affordable care for infants and school age children is in especially high demand. Infants are more time intensive to care for and are associated with stricter regulatory requirements, which likely contributes to the shortage. Parents of school age children are often only looking for a few hours of supplemental care (e.g., after school), which can be hard for providers to accommodate since they prefer all-day arrangements with families.

FIGURE 22: EIELSON HOUSEHOLD FOCUS GROUP RESULTS IN RESPONSE TO THE PROMPT, “GRADE YOUR LEVEL OF SATISFACTION WITH ACCESS TO CHILD CARE”



The on-base Child Development Center (CDC) is primarily staffed by military dependents who rotate locations every two to three years. This results in high turnover at the CDC, which causes periodic staffing shortages and reduced capacity to offer care for Air Force families. This issue is exacerbated by the slow application process for bringing on new staff, which includes a background check that can delay the hiring process for months.

The challenge of unmet child care is not unique to EAFB. According to Blue Star Families’ 2017 Military Family Lifestyle Survey, 67 percent of

military family respondents indicated they are not always able to obtain the child care they need. Survey results also indicate these child care challenges impact women more than men: for example, 67 percent of female service members reported they could not find child care that works with their schedules compared to only 33 percent of male service members.

National Accreditation Standards

Stringent national accreditation standards are another barrier that limit Air Force families’ access to child care. When the on-base child care center reaches capacity, the Air Force has a fee assistance program to help offset costs for Air Force families who opt to use an off-base provider as an alternative. However, the provider eligibility requirements for the fee assistance are stricter than Alaska’s licensing requirements. Achieving the national accreditation is expensive and there are very few, if any, resources for providers to access the needed training in Alaska. As a result, the fee assistance is essentially unusable for Eielson households seeking off-base child care.

EDUCATION AND CHILD CARE STRATEGIES – WHAT ARE OUR RECOMMENDED SOLUTIONS FOR MEETING ANTICIPATED GAPS?

Education

E1. Improve information-sharing between the Air Force and the FNSBSD around arrival and demographics of families with school-aged children.

This will allow the school district to be more proactive rather than reactive when planning for new student arrivals. Today, parents typically wait to register their children in school until after they have identified a housing location, which often results in last minute registrations that create a challenge for school administrators and impact budget estimates. To help the school district prepare for incoming students, the Air Force should communicate the estimated timing of arrival and number of students by grade levels for incoming households, so at a minimum the District has an estimate of the number of new Air Force students and can begin preparations in advance of student registration at a regional level.

“ The FNSBSD has a new software system called VersaTrans, which includes school locations and zoning boundaries. We can move boundaries around and run what-if scenarios to see how boundary changes impact enrollment numbers at different schools. ”

-FNSBSD Administrator

E2. Continue to encourage EAFB families to enroll their children in on-base schools, even if living off-base.

- a. Fill on-base schools that have additional capacity.
- b. Decrease pressure on off-base schools that are at or very near capacity.
- c. Consider streamlining this process, such as changing the Out of Attendance Area waiver requirement so it only needs to be filled out once instead of annually, and explore ways to coordinate transportation for off-base military families with children enrolled on-base. (See Fiscal Impacts chapter for additional related strategies).

E3. Explore options for elementary and middle schools that are anticipated to reach maximum capacity, especially in the Greater North Pole and Salcha areas.

- a. Utilize the FNSB School District’s new technology to reevaluate school boundaries and make updates to accommodate changing distribution and enrollment patterns. This will be especially important as new housing developments are constructed in and around North Pole, where many schools are already at or near capacity.

- b. Consider techniques such as the addition of portable classrooms to support schools that are over capacity.
- c. As necessary, and after having exercised other options, evaluate need and feasibility of constructing an additional elementary or middle school in the Greater North Pole area (99705).

E4. Support implementation of existing military grants and explore additional funding opportunities.

E5. Encourage the State of Alaska to maintain or increase existing levels of funding, including the Base Student Allocation formula.

E6. Streamline the approval process for military-connected students transferring from other states for programs.

E7. Modify schedules for on-base family events and activities at the chapel, youth center and other locations to make it easier for military families with children enrolled in off-base schools to participate in programs.

E8. Encourage off-base schools and parent-teacher associations (PTAs) with high military-connected student enrollment to expand outreach and education to better engage military families.

E9. Continue to encourage the bus contractor First Student to improve the reliability of bus transportation.

E10. Offer before and after child care programming and/or child care at all local elementary schools.

- a. Off-base schools typically release students about an hour after on-base schools and need time to travel to on-base activities.

Child Care

E11. Work with the Air Force to waive part of the national accreditation requirements so licensed Alaska providers are eligible for Air Force Child Care Fee Assistance.

E12. Conduct marketing efforts to ensure local child care providers know about the opportunities, training needs and requirements associated with the F-35 Beddown.

E13. Expand workforce recruitment to encourage residents and incoming dependents to get trained and licensed as child care providers.

- a. Increase advertising and outreach regarding existing training opportunities.
- b. Consider scholarships or incentives for pursuing a degree or career in child care, such as loan forgiveness programs for those who work in the field for a minimum period of time.
- c. Continue to build collaborative partnerships with workforce development programs, trade schools and universities to increase access to training opportunities.
- d. Identify ways to reduce the time for the approval and certification process for hiring new staff at the Eielson Child Development Center.

E14. Continue to implement Alaska's Quality Recognition and Improvement System (QRIS) program.

- a. Develop additional training levels and encouraging provider participation.

E15. Increase communication and collaboration between EAFB Child and Youth Services programs with community and state child care organizations to increase utilization of community resources.

“ Some of our staff recently attended a Thread training session and it was fabulous. We should do more collaboration with them. ”

-EAFB Child and Youth Services
Interviewee