

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT



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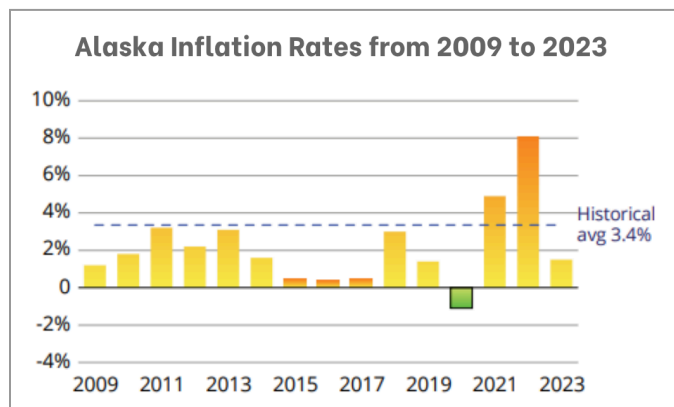


Introduction

The Pathways to a Safer Sitka Coalition is a group of local agencies and individuals working together to create a healthier, more equitable community. We aim to reduce negative health outcomes, such as domestic violence, substance use, and suicide by building equitable, accessible, and culturally-responsive services and systems. This Community Needs Assessment (CNA) was developed to compile current data regarding the health of the Sitka community to determine focus points for the Pathways Coalition moving forward within each of its goal areas: school environments, youth leadership, male engagement, family engagement, and community environments. The members of the Pathways Coalition who participated in the development of this CNA are: Center For Community/Early Learning Program (CFC/ELP), Sitkans Against Family Violence (SAFV), Sitka Counseling (SC), Sitka School District (SSD), Sitka Tribe of Alaska (STA), and Youth Advocates of Sitka (YAS). Additional Pathways partners are Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium (SEARHC), Sitka Conservation Society (SCS), and City of Sitka Parks and Recreation.



Sitka, traditionally known as Sheet'ká, is a small rural Southeast Alaskan community located on Shee (Baranof Island) which is home to around 8,400 residents and is only accessible by boat or plane. The main island that residents live on is a conjunction of two islands: Baranof and Japonski, which is connected by the O'Connell Bridge that was built in 1971. The town's population is around 48% female and 52% male. Sheet'ka is relatively racially diverse with 63.5% of residents being white, 10.3% American Indian or Alaska Native, 7.3% Asian, 17.4% reporting Mixed Race, 0.6% Black or African American, and 7.1% Hispanic or Latino (United States Census, 2021). Due to Sheet'ka's remote location, food and outside resources are scarce and expensive. With rising inflation rates, many residents are struggling to afford housing and food, let alone other necessary living expenses. As of 2022, Sheet'ká has the highest rental



rate out of any surveyor borough in Alaska, sitting at a whopping average of \$1,537/month¹ (Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, 2023). These astronomical rental costs are largely due to the increase of short-term rentals

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¹ Adjusted average rent for all Sitka units increased to \$1,648 per month in 2024.

and seasonal housing like AirBnB and vacation homes. For the purposes of this assessment, we will be referring to Sheet’ka as Sitka from this point forward.

The City and Borough of Sitka is home to the Sitka School District (SSD) that includes Xóots Elementary, Keet Gooshi Heen Elementary School (KGH), Blatchley Middle School (BMS), Sitka High School (SHS), Pacific High School (PHS), and Respecting Educational Alternatives and Choices in Homeschooling (REACH). Mt. Edgecumbe High School (MEHS) is another school located on Japonski Island that is not part of the Sitka School District, but accepts locals as students along with students from across the state. Mt. Edgecumbe is a state-run boarding school and brings in students from various parts of Alaska, often from predominantly rural Alaska Native communities where students have little access to secondary education. According to Sitka School District data, 35.5% of the Sitka school population is eligible for either free or reduced lunch.² The racial demographic breakdown of SSD students are: 50% identify as white, 28% identify as Alaska Native/American Indian, 7% identify as Asian, 5% identify as Hispanic, 1% identify as Black, 1% identify as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 1% identify as two or more races (Sitka School District, 2023).

Sitka relies on a variety of economic sectors like seafood processing, healthcare, and tourism. Much like other industries, these sectors experienced a sharp drop in employment and dip in the market in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent reports have observed a complete return to pre-pandemic economic trends in the seafood industry, and predict the tourism sector will continue to increase. Wage, salary, and employment are still 3% below the 2019 rates, but are expected to grow (McKinley Research Group, 2023).

Education rates in Sitka are promising; around 95% of the 25+ population have a High School Degree or higher and 34% of the 25+ population have a Bachelor’s degree or higher. The current median household income is \$82,083 in Sitka³, which is slightly above Alaska’s average median household income that lands at \$80,287⁴ (United States Census, 2021). However, further understanding of Sitka’s income and poverty levels are elaborated in the Key Findings section.

Sitka has a robust history of outside contact, from the Russians, Finnish, Americans, and the British. While cultural exchange and trading happened between the Lingít (Alaska Native people primarily inhabiting Southeast Alaska) and these groups,

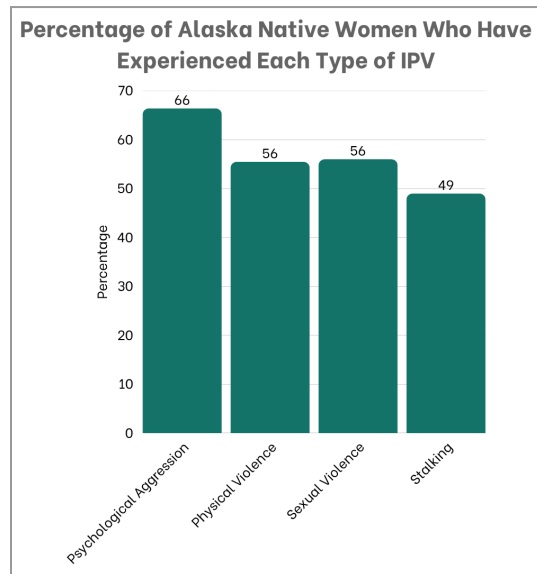


² In school year 2024/2025, 31% of students enrolled in the school district were eligible for free and reduced lunches, however, two-thirds of families did not apply; the percentage of families who are eligible is likely higher. SSD intends to do an outreach campaign to reach and enroll more eligible families. In the school year 2025/2026, 34% of SSD students were eligible.

³ The U.S. census defines a household as any member of the household who is 15 or older.

⁴ As of 2024, Sitka’s median household income has increased to \$95,261, and Alaska’s to \$86,631.

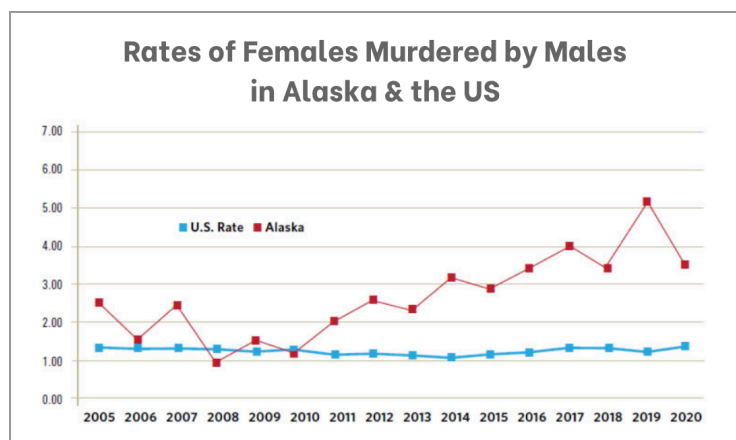
colonization also left deep scars in Indigenous communities across Alaska. Russians and Americans introduced diseases like Tuberculosis, Smallpox, respiratory illnesses, Influenza, and Syphilis which killed between 20–50% of the Alaska Native population (Haigh & Murphy, 2018). Residential boarding schools, systematic separation of families, criminalization of Indigenous culture, slavery, exploitation of resources, physical and sexual abuse that occurred during these times has been linked with poor health outcomes for Alaska Native communities today. Statistics show that Alaska Native people experience the highest rates of domestic violence, suicide, substance



use, sexual assault, homicide, and chronic illness than any other racial group in Alaska (Indian Health Service, 2019). In fact, some research suggests that Alaska Native women experience rates of domestic violence up to ten times higher than any other racial group in the United States (Indian Law Resource Center, 2022). The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) (2016) reports 66.4% of Alaska Native women have experienced psychological aggression by an intimate partner, 55.5% have experienced physical violence by an intimate partner, 56.1% have experienced sexual violence, and 48.8% have experienced stalking by an intimate partner. In addition, 70% of Alaska Native men report experiencing psychological aggression by an intimate partner, 43.2% have experienced physical violence by a partner, 27.5% have

experienced sexual violence, and 18.6% have experienced stalking. Alaska also has the highest homicide rate in the nation for women killed by men, for the seventh year in a row (Stremple, 2022). Women in Alaska are killed at more than twice the national average rate. In 2020, the rate of American Indian/Alaska Native women killed by men in Alaska was 12.63 per 100,000 women, which is more than three and a half times the rate for all women in Alaska, and 10 times the rate for white women in Alaska (Violence Policy Center, 2022). National rates of victimization for Native women are equally jarring; homicide is the third leading cause of death for Native women across the U.S (Lucchesi & Echo-Hawk, 2018).

Additionally, this group is significantly more likely to experience rape in their lifetime compared to other women and are more likely to be killed by their intimate partners compared to other types of offenders. An astounding 81.6% of American Indian and Alaska Native men have experienced violence in their lifetime, compared to 64% of their



white counterparts. Furthermore, the lifetime violence victimization rate is 1.2 times as high for American Indian and Alaska Native women as for white women; therefore, AI/AN women are more likely to need services, but less likely to have access to those services (National Institute of Justice, 2016).

Methods

The process for updating the Community Needs Assessment (CNA) involved several methods including focused conversations with members in the Pathways Steering Committee (community prevention coalition), the Sitka Youth Leadership Committee (youth coalition), and the Pathways Family Engagement Workgroup (subcommittee of the community coalition), as well as reviewing secondary data from various sources. Additionally, seven members from the coalition worked together in a subcommittee to determine the secondary data needed, sources to review, and divvy out roles for collecting, analyzing, and compiling this data.

Eleven members representing six partner organizations attended the annual Pathways Steering Committee meeting on June 7th, 2023. Time was allocated for reconnecting and reassessing. The steering committee meeting is typically held annually and brings together heads of agencies or departments to review the coalition's previous year's successes, set goals for the upcoming year, and map out a plan for going forward. The meeting in 2023 was dedicated to bringing everyone up to speed on the coalition, specifically new attendees, getting everyone oriented to the new Pathways website, and engaging in a process to update the community needs assessment. A consensus-building process and other facilitation tools were utilized to engage partners in reflective conversations about the coalition's initiatives over the years. This included discussing what has led to its successes, what has gotten in the way and/or remains a barrier, and finally, what needs are emerging that, if addressed, would alleviate the barriers and move the work forward. Participants were prompted to work on their own, in pairs, and small groups to discuss and identify potential strategies, and share ideas with the larger group for feedback and further discussion. Several needs statements came out of this process and serve as a reference point and guide for moving the work forward.

The Sitka Youth Leadership Committee (SYLC), a group of youth leaders in Sitka dedicated to changing harmful norms and promoting equity, engages in a needs assessment process each year to determine priorities and projects for the year. In the fall of 2023, six SYLC teens from Mt. Edgecumbe, Pacific, and Sitka High Schools participated in a workshop at the beginning of the year to discuss the issues their predecessors identified in past years. They determined how relevant these issues are for the current members, and discussed the messages they are getting around these issues, where they are seeing them, and what new messages they want their peers to be getting instead. Similarly, the Peer Education program, which consists of some of the same members as SYLC, but is also open to non-SYLC members, engaged in a similar assessment process at the beginning of the year about healthy and unhealthy relationships. Seven teens participated in the Peer Education conversation. Subsequent discussions occurred at meetings throughout the fall during both SYLC and Peer Education with additional members to ensure decisions made were reflective of the entire group. Discussions included an assessment of the current reality around issues in

Advocacy Center database, and the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development. Additional local data includes Sitka School District attendance, graduation, and matriculation rates, as well as the percentage of free and reduced lunches among the district's students, and Sitka Counseling's Sitka Substance Use Survey (SUSY).

While completing this CNA, there were various limitations that came up. Some of these limitations include outdated sources. For example, some of the 2023 CDC national YRBS data was released in the form of a trends report, but the actual database has not been released yet. As a result, the national data in this assessment is limited to either the 2023 trends report or 2021 CDC data. Hence, for certain data points such as sexual dating violence, the most recent national data available is from 2021. Further, Alaska did not conduct the statewide YRBS in 2021 (due to the pandemic), hence the gap in data, however, Alaska released its 2023 YRBS data in January 2025. It's important to note that the AK YRBS does not ask respondents to indicate gender identity, only sex; it also excludes LGBTQ+ data. Additionally, our information about victimization rates of Alaska Native women and men is limited to data from the Urban Indian Health Institute's 2018 report about Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG). This was the most recent data available relating to the MMIWG crisis because statistics on this topic is limited from lack of funding and research. It should be noted that some of the secondary data used was on the statewide or national level, as there was no local data available. We were not able to acquire specific numbers regarding partner agency services for adult mental health support or substance use treatment. We have, however, informally received information via conversations with mental health practitioners who have shared repeatedly they are overwhelmed with the demand for their services and do not have the capacity to meet the increasing need for mental health support.

A draft of the CNA was compiled and submitted to state funders for a grant deliverable in July 2023. Since then, revisions to the draft have been made to reflect the most updated data available (e.g., footnotes to reflect 2024 & 2025 data where available). Before finalizing the CNA, there were multiple feedback sessions on each of the five focus areas (e.g., family engagement, youth leadership, male engagement, schools, and community environments) to ensure accuracy and relevance to the community, as well as achieve collective buy-in for next steps amongst the coalition and additional key stakeholders. The Family Engagement Workgroup met in May 2024 to review the section on family engagement; the Peer Culture Workgroup met in June 2024 to review the section on youth leadership; the Pathways Steering Committee met in October 2024 to review the schools and community environments sections; and in December 2024, men who were formerly involved in male engagement efforts (e.g., coaches for BRITK, focus groups) along with several coalition members (SC, YAS, SAFV) met to discuss the findings in the male engagement section. Additionally, a special review session was scheduled with key SSD administrators in May 2025 to discuss the findings in the schools section as no representatives from SSD were available to attend the Pathways Steering Committee meeting in October 2024. All review sessions utilized a similar process, which included time to read through the specific CNA section, discuss and reflect on findings, and brainstorm how the data could be used to inform next steps. These steps have been incorporated into a map

which outlines the focus area, the problems being addressed, needs statements, and potential strategies, and will serve as a guide for moving the collective work forward. See the Conclusion for the CNA Roadmap. Additionally, feedback and edits to the narrative were solicited at each review session and were incorporated into the narrative post-review sessions. The final CNA was completed in early 2026; a snapshot (one-pager with highlights from the CNA) was created and finalized by coalition members in the Pathways Communications Workgroup (SAFV, SC, STA). A data chart was created highlighting specific data points for each of the key findings listed in the snapshot (e.g., violence, mental health, substance use). This data chart is meant to be user-friendly (i.e., quick reference to find data points) as well as used as a tool for tracking trends over the long-term (data is updated each year as available). The CNA Snapshot, Roadmap, and Data Chart were shared at the Pathways Steering Committee meeting in February 2026 to guide the development of a dissemination plan in order to share the CNA findings with various pertinent audiences within the community. The data chart was also a helpful reference in guiding updates to the Pathways Strategic Plan, specifically the goals and outcomes. CNA data has already been shared with a number of audiences (e.g., SAFV Board, Pathways Steering Committee) and will continue to be shared by partners to audiences across Sitka.

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS

Community Needs Assessment

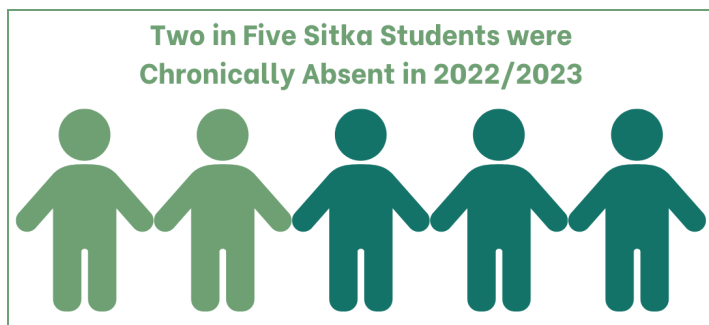


The focus in this section is **school environments**, which is reflective of Pathways' first goal: Sitka Schools have increased the extent to which they promote and foster healthy social-emotional environments.

Key Findings

The Pathways Coalition recognizes that a community's school system has a large impact on what the future will look like for both students and the larger community. Coalition members identified school climate as an area to collectively strengthen and created a goal in the Pathways strategic plan to increase the extent to which the Sitka schools promote and foster healthy social-emotional environments. A sense of belonging and connection among students, staff, and families within a school system are critical factors in an individual's ability to thrive and succeed academically. Without it, students not only struggle with their studies and/or their general enthusiasm about school, but they are also more at risk for other negative outcomes, such as suicide, interpersonal violence, and substance use. According to Kids Count 2024, Alaska is ranked forty-seven out of fifty in education, with lower scores than the national average in every category. These categories included percent of young children (ages 3 and 4) not in school, fourth graders not proficient in reading, eighth graders not proficient in math, and high school students not graduating on time.

In the Sitka School District (SSD), specifically since the COVID-19 pandemic, both graduation and attendance rates have decreased greatly with an average of 20% of students not graduating, and about 42% meeting the criteria for chronic absenteeism⁷ during the 2022-2023 school year.⁸ Additionally, students with



disabilities, and those who are economically disadvantaged are graduating at lower rates, on average, every year. These marginalized populations are also dropping out at a higher rate and are more subject to chronic absenteeism, as are American Indian/Alaska Native students (AI/AN) (DEED, 2023).

Disaggregating the graduation and

dropout rate data, shows there are significant disparities between schools within the Sitka School District. For example, Pacific High School (PHS), Sitka's alternative high school, had a dropout rate of 14.58% in Spring 2023, whereas Sitka High School's was less than 1%⁹ (DEED, 2023). Additionally, Pacific High School's graduation rate that year was 45.45%, whereas Sitka High School's was 91%¹⁰ (DEED, 2023). This coincides with the timing of the closure of Raven's Way in Sitka, a residential treatment program under the Sitka School District for adolescents offering experiential learning through

⁷ A student is considered chronically absent if they miss more than ten percent of school days while being enrolled for at least half a year.

⁸ Chronic absenteeism has decreased to 36% as of the 2023/2024 school year.

⁹ As of Spring 2024, PHS's dropout rate is at 11%. SHS's is at 0%.

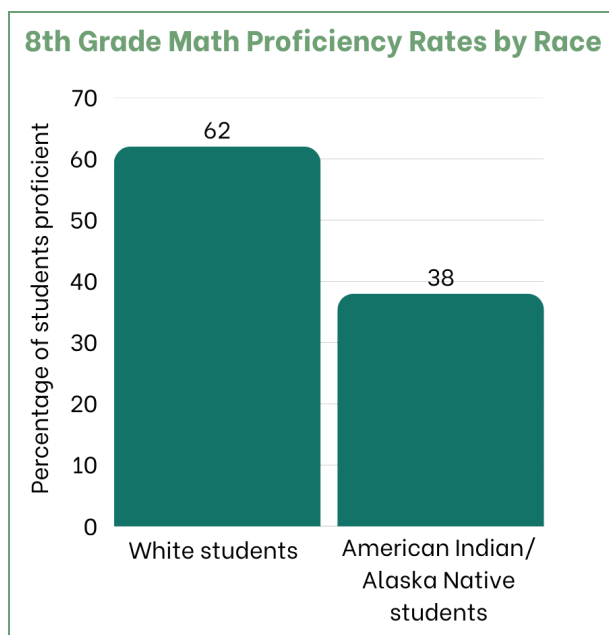
¹⁰ As of Spring 2024, PHS's graduation rate is at 38%. SHS's is at 95.83%.

outdoor and alternative education, resulting in lowered graduation rates for the district. Additionally, PHS’s graduation rates are on track with national averages for alternative schools.

PHS is essential for students who struggle in traditional education settings, providing an opportunity for students who may not otherwise receive a high school diploma. Students who face societal barriers, have experienced trauma, are neurodivergent, etc. can significantly benefit from alternative education options where smaller classrooms and hands-on learning are emphasized. It can be challenging to strike a balance between equal and equitable education in traditional school environments; meeting students’ unique needs where they are at. While graduation and dropout rates are the compounded result of many external factors, such as coming out of a pandemic and decline in youth mental health, school districts have the power and influence to create educational environments that are safe and conducive to equitable learning for all its students. In the Sitka School District’s Strategic Plan from 2021, a primary goal states “100% of our students will graduate” (SSD, 2021). While this is not the case at either high school yet, it is important to acknowledge the work that is happening to support increased graduation rates as well as examine the discrepancies between schools to identify where there are gaps in meeting students’ needs.

Furthermore, research shows that both third grade reading and eighth grade math proficiency are indicators of future success (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013 & 2022). Although proficiency rates in Sitka have increased since the pandemic with 52% of third graders proficient in reading as of 2022/2023¹¹, large disparities still exist among students who identify as AK Native/American Indian, and/or who are economically disadvantaged compared to their white and/or not economically disadvantaged peers. For example, reading proficiency rates among white third grade students are about 65%, whereas only 31% of AN/AI third graders meet proficiency.

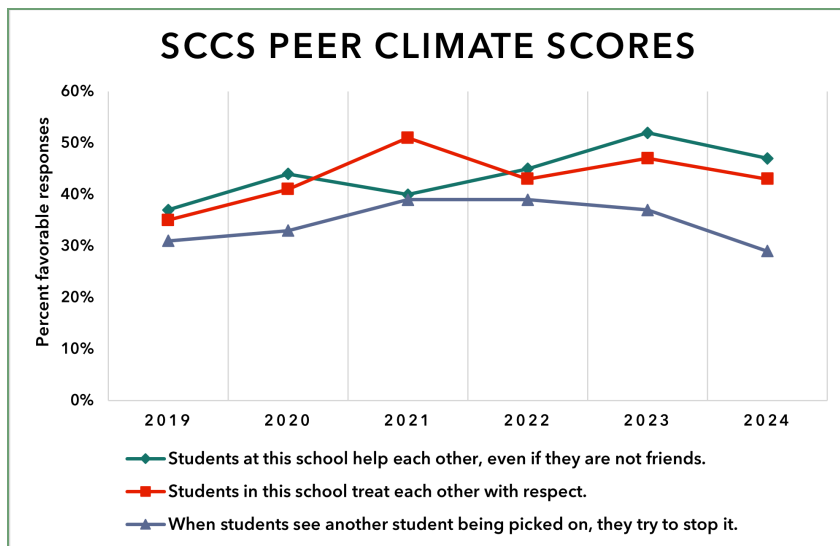
Additionally, only 35% of economically disadvantaged third graders are proficient in reading, compared to 63% of those not economically disadvantaged. White students and those not economically disadvantaged therefore have nearly double the reading proficiency rates compared to their peers in third grade. Similar disparities appear in eighth grade math proficiency. Overall, about 51% of Sitka eighth graders are proficient in math as of 2022/2023; this includes 62% of white students, and only 38% of AN/AI



¹¹ As of 2023/2024, third grade reading proficiency rates have dropped again to about 41%; this includes 46% of white students and 29% of AN/AI students.

students.¹² This is consistent with the gaps among students from families with lower income; those without economic disadvantages had over double the rates of proficiency as economically disadvantaged eighth graders¹³ (DEED, 2023).

About 44% of the Sitka School District (SSD) graduates enrolled in post-secondary education for the academic year following graduation in 2023. The 2021, 2022, and 2023 school year rates of enrollment in post-secondary education show a significant decrease as compared to the years prior to COVID where over 50% of students went on to post-secondary education¹⁴ (DEED, 2023). Mount Edgecumbe High School (MEHS), a public boarding school located in Sitka but separate from the Sitka School District, gives students, especially those in rural Alaska, the opportunity to get a high school education they might not otherwise be able to get. MEHS's graduation rates are 98% with attendance rates at 93%, while their dropout and chronic absenteeism rates are lower than the state average. In addition, 50% of MEHS graduates enrolled in post-secondary education for the academic year following graduation (DEED, 2023).



There are a lot of factors that go into whether or not a child will be successful in a school system (e.g., proficiency, graduation), but feeling safe and respected, as well as having the support of caring adults and access to social-emotional tools are essential in creating an environment conducive to learning. In Sitka, 2 out of 3 third through fifth graders consistently felt safe at school during the

last year. Among students in sixth through twelfth grade, 82% felt as though the teachers and staff treated them with respect, and 74% felt that they consistently had an adult at the school who they are comfortable going to when things are bothering them. Additionally, a positive peer climate also contributes to a feeling of safety and respect among students within the school environment. However, students in both the elementary school and secondary school settings reported much lower rates of feeling respected by their peers than they did in regards to feeling respected and supported by the adults at their school. Only 1 out of 3 third through fifth graders said they felt

¹² As of 2023/2024, eighth grade math proficiency rates have improved to about 67%. The data also shows less of a gap between AN/AI students' and white students' proficiency rates.

¹³ As of 2023/2024, economically disadvantaged eighth graders' math proficiency rates are about 12% lower than not economically disadvantaged students.

¹⁴ As of 2023/2024, post-secondary enrollment has increased to 47% of graduates.

respected by their peers, while 63% reported that they *sometimes* felt respected by their peers. Within the secondary school setting, less than half of the students reported that students at their school treat each other with respect. Additionally, only 37% of students felt that students at their school intervene when they see a peer being picked on;¹⁵ the lowest scoring question in the peer climate category (AASB, 2023).

Furthermore, two parent focus groups were conducted by SSD in partnership with STA and SAFV in the fall of 2023, where bullying among students in the schools was named the top area of concern by a majority of parents in attendance.¹⁶ So while student numbers are showing they feel connected to caring adults within their schools, the peer climate seems to be an area to address and strengthen within all the Sitka schools.

As students are struggling to navigate this post-pandemic world, which is noted in the Youth Leadership (YL) section of the CNA, so are teachers. Almost 70% of teachers and staff in SSD reported feeling worn out in their work in ways that interfere with other parts of their lives¹⁷ (AASB, 2023). Additionally, the World Health Organization (WHO) reports that there has been a 25% increase in the prevalence of anxiety and depression worldwide since the pandemic. This increase has coincided with severe disruptions to services, leaving huge gaps in care for those who need it most, particularly for young people who are more at risk for suicide and self-harming behaviors (WHO, 2022). The increase in need and gap in services can make it hard for teachers, who are also dealing with their own personal challenges, to show up fully for their students. Despite the district's efforts to provide Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and a school goal emphasizing 100% of its students will have access to mental health supports, COVID has increased the need for more universally offered, schoolwide supports, as well as more early intervention and targeted supports. With staff being over capacity since COVID, students are likely not getting the individualized support they need to manage their mental well-being. Mount Edgecumbe High School (MEHS) has additional supports in place, including a team of folks who make up the wellness team and are available to students who are struggling; this is likely because students live on campus, and staff are responsible for supporting their students' social-emotional needs inside and outside of the academic setting.¹⁸ However, COVID has drastically increased the need for support there too as reported by MEHS youth in the Sitka Youth Leadership Committee. Capacity is certainly an issue everywhere, and with continuous cuts to education budgets, a school's ability to establish and sustain the necessary systems and structures of support for their students' wellbeing and academic success is even more challenging.

Student-led presentations on healthy relationships given by the Sitka Youth Leadership Committee's (SYLC) peer educators began again after the pandemic, in

¹⁵ As of 2023/2024, this has dropped to 29% of students who felt that students at their school intervene when they see a peer being picked on.

¹⁶ Parent focus groups were composed of thirteen parents total, ages 31- 78, representing 34 children/grandchildren spanning pre-school through high school; all but one guardian identified as a tribal citizen or parents of tribal citizens.

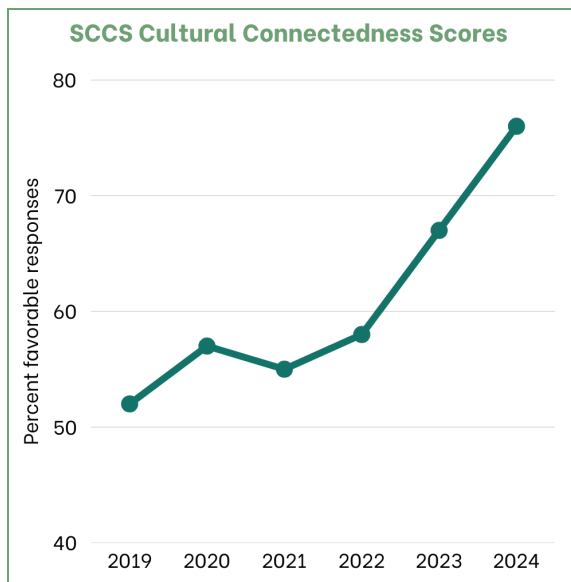
¹⁷ As of 2024, this rate has not improved, but rather worsened by 1%.

¹⁸ In the fall of 2025, significant budget cuts and admin turnover occurred at MEHS contributing to a number of challenging issues at the school including concerns about student safety. It is unclear if mental health supports are still in tact across the school.

school year 2021-2022. With an increase in education and messaging in the school environment on this topic, youth and adult presenters have noticed an increase in teen disclosures about abuse. Open conversations in the classroom led by youth leaders have allowed for participants to take a deeper look at their own lives and identify when they've experienced harm done by another; whether by a family member, friend, or partner. This realization has caused students to want to share their story with the adult presenter post-presentation. The adult being a mandatory reporter, would often have to make a report without knowing if there would be continuing support for the student once a report is made. Communication systems and school protocols were not always clear about *who* to connect the student with in the school environment to best support them as they navigate the legal system after a disclosure has occurred. On this note, the 2023 SCCS showed there was a decrease in SSD staff feeling as though there were support systems to respond to trauma experienced by their students in the past year, suggesting a need to put better school-wide structures, protocols, and communications systems in place that ensure a youth's emotional and physical safety, particularly when disclosures occur resulting in increased emotional distress for youth.



Additionally, feeling a sense of belonging, for both students and their families, is an important piece in creating a school environment where all students are able to reach their potential. According to the SSD SCCS, 84% of sixth-twelfth graders believed their school is a welcoming place for families like theirs, and 87% of



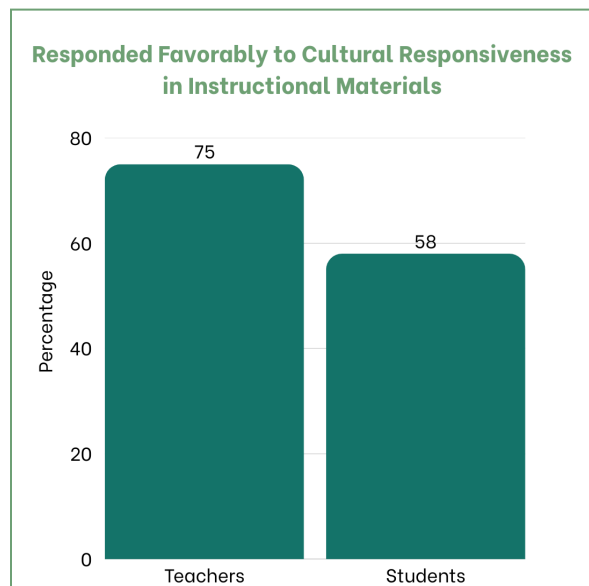
sixth-twelfth graders agreed their school values and welcomes Elders. Family responses show similar results; 90% of families agreed their school is a welcoming place for families like theirs, and 85% agreed their school values and welcomes Elders. However, disaggregating the data tells a slightly different story, and those who are struggling economically as well as those who identify as Alaska Native responded less favorably by approximately 10%¹⁹ (AASB, 2023).

Another way for families and students to feel a sense of belonging in the schools is by involving parents/families in the academic setting in some way. Though 85% of families agreed their school involves parents/families

¹⁹ As of 2024 SCCS data, there is not a notable discrepancy between favorable responses among white families and Alaska Native families.

in most school events or activities, only 54% agreed the school involves parents/families in making important decisions (e.g., curriculum changes, school policies, dress code). This percentage is even lower among AK Native families at 43%. In addition, when staff were asked how often they provide opportunities for families to give input on decisions for their classrooms or school, only 39% of staff responded favorably.²⁰ Perhaps more intentionally involving parents/families in decisions that affect their child’s learning and overall sense of belonging would instill a sense of empowerment as well as ownership among parents, resulting not only in students/families feeling more connected to school, but improving proficiency rates as well. Additionally, only 66% of parents/families reported that the school regularly shares ideas with them on what they can do at home to support their child’s learning; 55% of parents/families reported that the schools ask them how to help their child do well in school (AASB, 2023). Strengthening family/school partnerships could be an area to focus on going forward as families’ involvement with a child’s learning shows significant improvements in the academic success of young people.

Enhancing a school’s environment to be more culturally reflective of the community is an effective way to improve academic success as well as ensure students and families feel a sense of well-being and connectedness to the school. There are many ways for educational institutions to become culturally responsive, whether it be by adapting instructional materials to be more place-based, creating spaces for students to share and learn about their heritage, or by visually representing the diversity of the student body around the school. Working with the Sitka Tribe of Alaska (STA) and through the Sitka Native Education Program, the Sitka School District has prioritized Culturally Responsive Embedded Social and Emotional Learning (CRESEL) within the educational system for many years. While the rates of cultural connectedness amongst students have steadily increased over the years in Sitka, likely due to the efforts of CRESEL, Alaska Native students, Black/African American students, and students of 2 or more races (not including Alaska Native), are still reporting lower rates of cultural connectedness. Only 55% of students responded favorably that their teachers make an effort to represent their culture in class. Additionally, only 58% of students and 67% of families see their family’s culture represented in class lessons, materials, posters, and art around the school, etc.²¹ In fact, in the same fall 2023 parent focus group as mentioned above, a lack of cultural



²⁰ As of 2024, this rate is down 17%, with only 22% of teachers responding favorably. In addition, only 39% of staff felt their school provides training on how to effectively partner with families according to 2024 data.

²¹ This has increased to 77% of families as of 2024; however, this still means nearly a quarter of families do not see their culture represented.

reflection in instructional material was also named a primary topic of concern for parents. Interestingly, staff perceptions of cultural connectedness differ greatly from the student and family responses with a 17% difference between what teachers believe they are doing to reflect their students' culture and ethnicity in instructional materials, and what their students perceive. However, the majority of families, students, and teachers all responded favorably to the survey question, "This school values the language and culture of its students and families," indicating that teachers *value* culturally responsive education, but are still trying to learn what that looks like in terms of their teaching materials. As the CRESEL work continues and becomes more central in the school district, there will likely continue to be increases in cultural connectedness amongst teachers, students, and families (AASB, 2023).

Consistent and receptive leadership is critical in closing the gaps within a school system and carrying out a district's strategic plan. At the start of COVID, the Sitka School District had several key administrative positions turn over at the district office. In the school year 2022/2023, after filling the superintendent position, staff reported that they did not feel as though district leadership was open to feedback and input from staff. Furthermore, that same year, there was a decrease in staff believing that district leadership supports efforts to improve school climate (AASB, 2023). During the Pathways' focused conversation in June 2023, school representatives shared that turnover with the superintendent role contributed to much of the discontentment from staff. Additionally, they also shared turnover added to delays in progressing with the strategic plan, which includes goals and objectives centered on closing the learning gap, strengthening culturally responsive programming, building up mental health supports, and strengthening community partnerships. However, at the start of the 2023/2024 school year, the district office stabilized, filling key administrative roles. Then, in the fall of 2024, SSD secured resources and hired a full-time assistant superintendent position. Consistent leadership with the right people is showing an improvement in staff morale and making it more possible to move forward with their strategic plan.²²

Recommendations

There are a number of concerns surfacing in each of the Pathways goal areas through this Community Needs Assessment (CNA) process, with many of the concerns cutting across multiple goals, particularly the school climate, youth leadership, and family engagement focus areas. In general, it seems there is a lack of coordination among schools and community partners which, if more intentionally established, could help bolster the efforts of the district to successfully address the gaps already identified in their strategic plan and echoed in this CNA. Secondary data confirms what many community partners, parents/guardians, and youth participants have shared anecdotally for years. Some significant areas of concern are the mental health status of young people and the lack of resources and support systems available to them in our community (see [SYLC's Mental Health Is Health Campaign](#) below).

In this post-pandemic era, students have shared how much they are struggling

²² As of 2024 data, about three quarters of staff now believe district leadership is open to input & supporting efforts to improve school climate.

with their mental health and feeling hopeless about accessing the help they need. Working together as a community, bringing schools, parents, community partners, and youth together to establish systems and structures that allow for increased visibility, accessibility, and availability to mental health resources is a potential solution. Youth feel isolated and alone, and are often left to cope with their circumstances without tools and little guidance from adults. They are often told by adults to “push through.” Offering ongoing trainings for adults to become more equipped with knowledge/tools to better recognize when a youth needs mental health support and provide the necessary help could help bridge the gap in mental health services in Sitka.²³

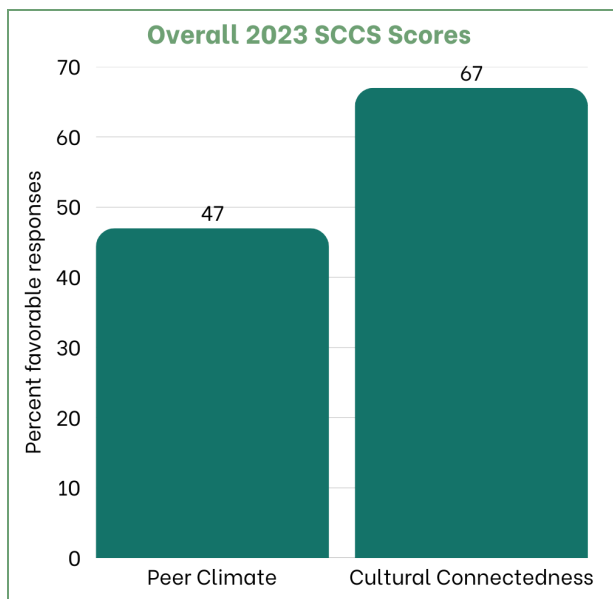
SYLC’s Mental Health is Health Campaign Posters



A more coordinated approach to providing wrap-around services to students who disclose abuse and improving communication systems and protocols across partners is needed, as there has been a steady increase in disclosures during the youth-led presentations provided by SYLC’s Peer Education program. Considering the high prevalence of teen dating violence nationally, this increase was not surprising. As teens become more aware of what an unhealthy relationship is, they begin to recognize when they have experienced it personally or when it has happened to someone close to them. There were more disclosures among teens during classroom presentations in 2022/2023 than in previous years combined, making it even more important for schools and partners to establish concrete systems of support that are trauma-informed and ensure a student’s emotional and physical safety.

School and community partnerships could also help curb the concerning peer climate numbers, which paint a grim picture about the way students in the school environment are treating each other. The overall peer climate scores are 47% and which is the lowest scoring category in the 2023 SCCS; these scores are 20% lower than the

²³ All Sitka High teachers and many SSD staff, as well as some community partners were trained in Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) during the school year 2023/2024; two community partners were trained as trainers for teen Mental Health First Aid (tMHFA) in Spring 2024 and trained 11 teens in tMHFA in Spring 2025.



second lowest scoring category, cultural connectedness.²⁴ These low scores have been fairly consistent the last five years, suggesting a clear area of concern. Creating a sense of belonging, safety, and a respectful school environment is crucial in setting students up for success both academically as well as in life. Partners could be more coordinated in working together to ensure there are opportunities built into the school day to enhance connectedness and respect among students. Perhaps providing teachers with bystander intervention tools or selecting a school-wide bullying prevention program could help shift the peer climate to be one that is more supportive and uplifting. The

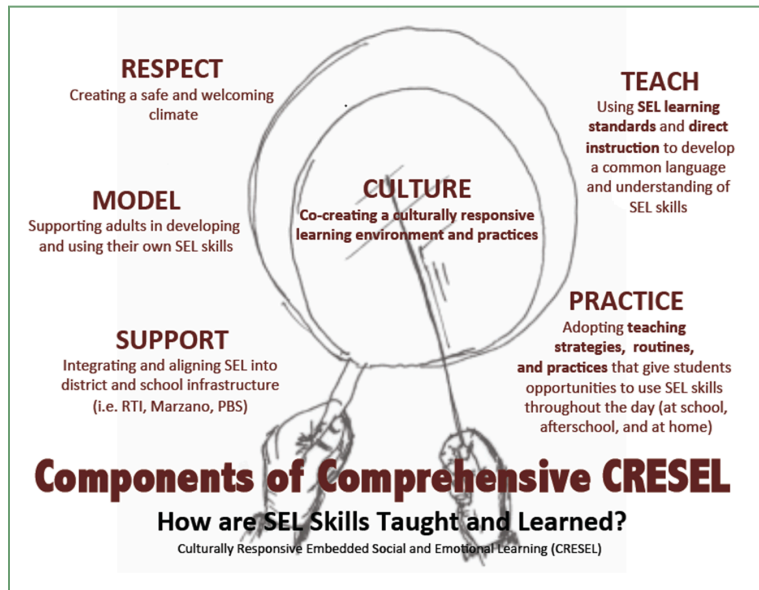
thirteen parents/guardians who participated in the fall 2023 parent focus group also echoed these sentiments. Additionally, streamlining strategies across classroom and afterschool settings so similar messages are reiterated across settings could help with shifting the climate.

Strengthening school and family partnerships could also result in positive student outcomes not only in regards to peer climate, but also with academic achievement and enrolling in post-secondary opportunities. Parents and families play a vital role in their child’s development and influence how serious their children are about their education, as well as role model behaviors for how to treat others. Providing resources to families through the school district’s channels to help support a child’s learning, encouraging conversations in the home about post-secondary opportunities, as well as providing information about how to talk to their children about important developmentally appropriate topics (e.g., relationships, problem-solving, mental health) could help improve overall student outcomes. These resources could be compiled collectively by schools and community partners. Additionally, involving parents/families in decisions about the school, whether that be about how to address the peer climate, or informing curriculum – particularly around integrating culture – could help parents feel a sense of ownership both in regards to supporting their child’s learning as well as setting expectations about behaviors at school. The school being a major communication channel for reaching parents, could be better utilized by both school staff and community partners as another vehicle for disseminating relevant and helpful resources to parents/families.

Culturally responsive education has been prioritized as a goal in the district’s strategic plan and though numbers across students, families, and staff show the Sitka School District values the language and culture of its students and families, adapting instructional materials to be more culturally reflective, or representing the diversity of

²⁴ According to most recent data, peer climate has dropped to 39% favorable responses, which is nearly 30% lower than the second lowest scoring category on the 2024 SCCS.

students around school is still an area to strengthen. Seeing one's culture represented in the schools increases the likelihood of connectedness and belonging, helping students feel seen and valued for who they are. These are simple strategies for building a respectful and inclusive environment, which could help students feel more excited about going to school and enthusiastic about learning. Perhaps providing more tools/training for teachers, as well as setting a district-wide expectation would improve efforts around



integrating culturally responsive strategies into the learning environment, and could lead to better attendance, graduation rates, and overall academic achievement.

More coordination and collaboration between schools, partners, and families is recommended. As stated in the Key Findings section, there has been significant turnover at the district office resulting in delays to moving the district's strategic plan forward. Pathways partners agree that working more in partnership with the district to put their key strategies into motion would be the best way forward as the SSD strategic plan already includes goals and strategies that align with the work of the Pathways Coalition (e.g., establishing mental health supports, strengthening culturally responsive programming, closing the achievement gap, providing professional development and trainings to staff, removing barriers for students, and strengthening community partnerships).

The recommendations coming out of this CNA align with previous conversations among key stakeholders, including the tribe, the school district, and other social service agencies. Conversations surrounding these topics date back to 2016, with both Sitka Tribe of Alaska and the Sitka School District expressing a need for more coordinated and comprehensive student support via a conversation co-facilitated by First Alaskans Institute (FAI) and the Association of Alaska School Boards. In this conversation, stakeholders identified needs for the following: more integration of cultural programs in schools, increasing AK Native representation in schools via teachers and elders, Lingít language classes for all ages, increasing identity and belonging among students, educators trained in how to reverently incorporate culture and language into their teaching, honest conversations about high drop out rates and low graduation rates, and increased respect for traditional family structures and knowledge (AASB et al., 2016).

More recently, the Sitka Native Education Program (SNEP) established goals for its "SNEP in Schools" program and reported back on their progress. These goals include the following: 1) Increase awareness of cultural career pathways; 2) Adoption of a revised culturally relevant curriculum; and 3) Enhance professional learning among

educators and staff. According to SNEP’s 2024-2025 Impact Report, initial concerns aligned with the needs outlined above. To address these, SNEP has begun implementing a variety of strategies. Because cultural implementation has been largely teacher-driven without district-wide mandates, SNEP hired a full-time curriculum developer with Lingít language expertise to develop and standardize lessons into an accessible digital format. Additionally, SNEP collaborates with organizations such as the Sitka Sound Science Center and Sitka Conservation Society, as well as PHS’s and SHS’s science and math departments to develop experiential learning that meets Science, Social Studies, and ELA standards, as well as afterschool activities. For professional development, educators engage in Lingít language learning via emailed lessons and in-person workshops, as well as hands-on and co-teaching work among SNEP staff. As mentioned, stronger family engagement is a major determinant in sustainability of strategies such as these, which is why SNEP has begun implementing a Home-School Connection piece to their new curriculum units (SNEP & SSD, 2025).

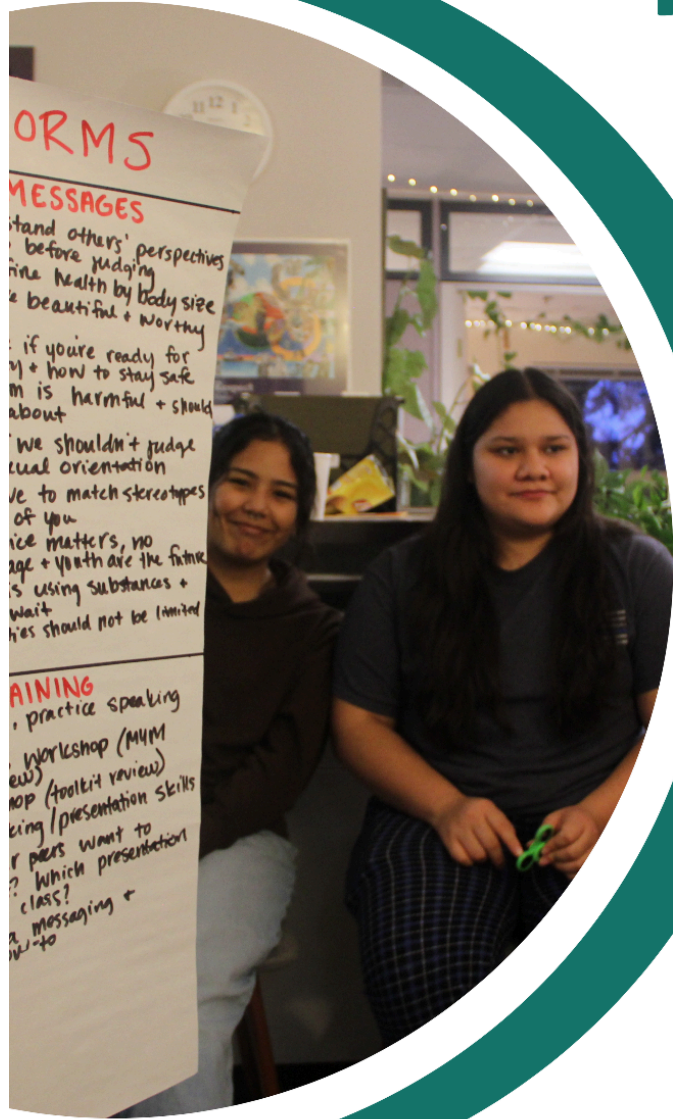
The SNEP model certainly marks progress towards these culturally responsive education goals; however, there must be a concerted and sustained effort district-wide. In their FY21 Strategic Plan, the Sitka School District identified the need for embedding culturally responsive lessons and social-emotional learning into its schools and providing professional development for staff, as well as increasing partnerships to continue this work (SSD, 2021). As shown through the First Alaskans Institute facilitated community conversation, SNEP Impact Report, and SSD’s Strategic Plan, as well as secondary data, all key stakeholders are saying the same thing: that implementing CRESEL is critical for increasing students’ sense of belonging. And while there has been notable progress in these goal areas since that 2016 conversation, this is still an urgent priority. It is a district-wide responsibility to support students holistically; coordinated and attentive responses to these needs are critical so that every student is supported and feels that they belong. As noted, these suggested changes are a culmination of conversations among key stakeholders across the community over several years, and therefore, highlight a pressing and urgent need in our community.

Needs Statement

Goal 1. School Environments - *Establish a more coordinated approach between the school district, community partners, and families to support and carry out the district’s strategic plan which already includes objectives around culturally responsive education and mental health supports, priorities the coalition has identified as a need to ensure a positive school environment.*

YOUTH LEADERSHIP

Community Needs Assessment



The focus in this section is **youth leadership**, which is reflective of Pathways' second goal: Youth are proactive within school and afterschool settings that support positive peer culture.

Key Findings

The Pathways Coalition works to support youth in becoming leaders in their community to proactively foster a positive peer culture both during school and in after-school settings. Coalition members recognize there are a number of protective factors which set youth up to be successful in achieving this outcome, as well as a number of risk factors making it more difficult for youth to develop into healthy thriving individuals who give back to their community. Connection to positive adults, having a supportive peer network, participating in extracurricular activities, having a sense of pride in oneself, and learning social-emotional skills are just a few of the necessary ingredients for youth to become positive influencers in their schools and community. Conversely, youth who have experienced bullying, sexual violence, teen dating violence, or lack opportunities for engagement and connections to healthy positive adults, are much more at risk for harming themselves or others, experiencing depression and anxiety as well as other mental health issues, and engaging in risky or delinquent behaviors (e.g., drinking, drug use, vandalism, theft and other crimes).

Teen dating violence and sexual violence rates are prevalent among teens in Alaska. According to the Alaska 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), of high school students who dated or went out with someone, about 6.3% report having experienced physical dating violence in the last year. In addition, about 1 in 7 female and 1 in 19 male high school students report having experienced sexual dating violence in the last year; this statewide data is significantly higher than national data from 2021, in which 1 in 25 male high school students reported experiencing sexual dating violence in the last year²⁵ (CDC, 2021). Further, almost 20% of surveyed female high school students experienced sexual violence by anyone during the past year, and 15.4% reported ever being physically forced to have sexual intercourse when they did not want to (State *Alaska*, 2023). These statewide rates of sexual violence are about 2%



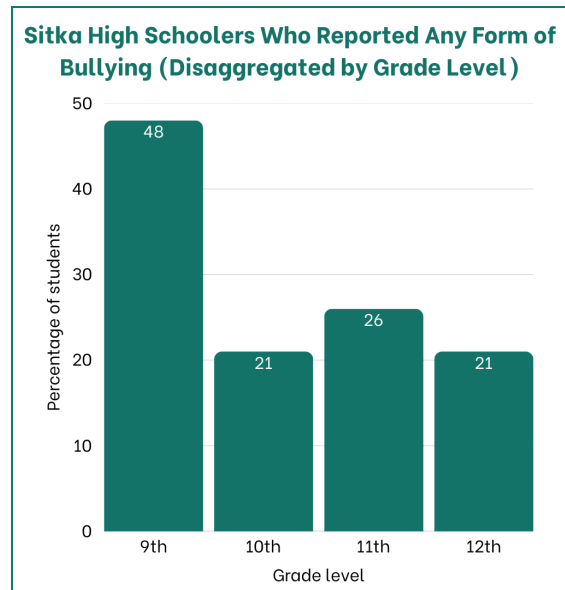
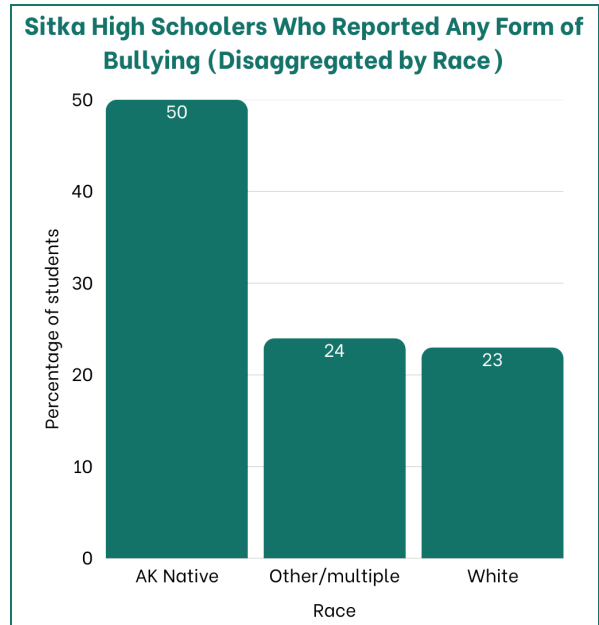
higher than the national average (CDC, 2023). And they are on the rise; the percentage of female students who experienced sexual violence by anyone increased both statewide and nationally from 2017 to 2023 (CDC, 2023 & State *Alaska*, 2023). Additionally, sexual violence disproportionately impacts American Indian/Alaska Native students, as these individuals were more likely than students from every other racial and ethnic group to have ever been forced

²⁵ As of 2023 CDC data, approximately 1 in 33 male high school students report experiencing sexual dating violence.

to have sex²⁶ (State *Alaska*, 2023).

Locally, sexual dating violence and physical dating violence data is suppressed for Sitka High School and Pacific High School, likely due to low numbers of reports. In contrast, 26.5% of Mount Edgecumbe High School female students reported experiencing sexual dating violence, and 19% reported experiencing physical dating violence. Additionally, about 1 in 3 MEHS female students reported ever being physically forced to have sex when they did not want to (State *MEHS*, 2023).

In Sitka, rates of bullying remain steady – 19% of Sitka high school students reported being bullied on school property during the past 12 months in both 2019 and 2023 (State *Sitka*, 2023), and 18% of students in 6th–12th grade reported witnessing other students threaten or bully other students between 3–12+ times (AASB, 2023). However, the percentage of Sitka high school students reporting any kind of bullying (on/off school property and/or electronically) went up from 25% in 2019 to 31% in 2023. While this is less than the statewide rate at 41%, it is important to note that 50% of Alaska Native students reported bullying in Sitka, which is over double the rate reported by white students (State *Sitka*, 2023). And at MEHS, 46% of



female students reported any kind of bullying in comparison to 22% of male students (State *MEHS*, 2023). Additionally, ninth graders experience bullying at approximately double the rate of their peers in other grades across high schools. Disaggregating the data reveals stark disparities in who is bullied most often in Sitka.²⁷

Bullying, sexual violence, and teen dating violence in adolescence can lead to later in life issues and are often a precursor to intimate partner violence and other forms of victimization/perpetration in adulthood. According to the 2020 Alaska Victimization Survey, 70% of Alaskan women experienced intimate partner violence, (e.g., physical, emotional, psychological, financial) in their

²⁶ 10.8% of American Indian/Alaska Native students compared to 9.8% of white students

²⁷ Alaska did not conduct the YRBS during 2021, hence why statewide data is lacking for that year.

lifetime, while 73% of Alaskan women experienced sexual violence (contact and non-contact) in their lifetime (University of Alaska Anchorage, 2020).

These adverse experiences early in life can make it difficult for a young person to make healthy choices or to engage in productive ways with others in their school and community. Without the right supports and interventions, youth are left to cope on their own, often experiencing severe mental health decline such as depression and anxiety, and sometimes contemplating suicide. Additionally, drugs and alcohol often become a coping mechanism as well as acting out in other reckless and impulsive ways. Sitka's School Climate and Connectedness Survey (AASB, 2023) shows that in the past 12 months at their school or at school events, 48% of Sitka students in 6th-12th grade reported witnessing another student destroy things like school property or other people's personal items between 1-12+ times; 18% reported seeing another student carrying a weapon at least 1-12+ times; 38% of students reported witnessing their peers get in a fight 1-12+ times; 15% of students reported seeing other students under the influence of drugs like meth, heroin, cocaine, etc.; 21% of students report seeing their peers under the influence of alcohol 1-12+ times. In December of 2024, the HOPE Coalition²⁸ published the Substance Use Survey for Youth (SUSY) in the Sitka School District, gauging substance and alcohol use among 6th-12th graders. They found that approximately 50% of Sitka high schoolers reported easy access to marijuana, alcohol, and tobacco products. Furthermore, rates of binge drinking among high school females were about 18% higher than among high school males in grade 12. And even at the middle school level, youth reported the highest rate of alcohol use (5%) since the start of this survey in 2020 (Sitka Counseling, 2024).

According to the most recent Sitka YRBS data, 21% of 12th graders reported binge drinking within the past 30 days, which is 7% higher than the statewide average. And consistent with SUSY data, female Sitka high schoolers report higher rates of binge drinking than youth across the state; 11.6% of Sitka females binge drink compared to 9% of all youth statewide. Furthermore, 23.4% of female Sitka high schoolers reported currently drinking alcohol compared to 9.6% of their male peers (State *Sitka*, 2023).

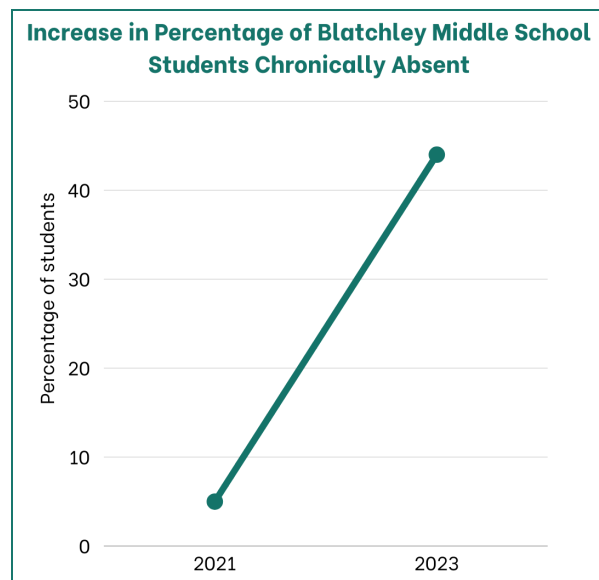
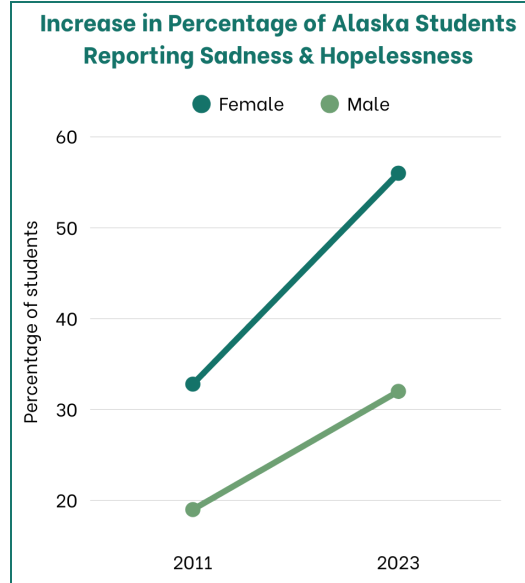
As highlighted above, while substance misuse still persists as an issue among youth in Sitka, there have been positive changes across the state. According to the statewide Alaska 2023 YRBS, smoking rates among high school students have been cut in half since 2011. In addition, fewer students drank alcohol at all within the last 30 days, down from 21% in 2019 to 17% in 2023. Education efforts surrounding the use of electronic vapor products have had a seemingly positive effect as well; 41.6% of students now think people greatly risk harming themselves if they use electronic vapor products every day, which is up nearly 15% since 2019. However, it is still important to recognize the disparities that persist in these statistics. Although smoking rates have been cut in half, American Indian/Alaska Native youth reported 6% higher rates of smoking. And although the percentage of students who have ever used marijuana continues to decline, this rate is 23% higher among American Indian/Alaska Native youth than their white peers (State *Alaska*, 2023). This highlights a critical theme across key findings: the need for equitable prevention work that takes into account the

²⁸ The HOPE Coalition is a community collaborative under the umbrella of Sitka Counseling dedicated to addressing and preventing substance misuse in Sitka.

many social and environmental factors that play into these health outcomes.

Another key health outcome—mental health—is of significant concern among youth across the nation. A national emergency in child and adolescent mental health was recently declared by the American Academy of Pediatrics (2021). According to the CDC’s nationwide 2023 YRBS, 40% of youth felt so sad and hopeless almost everyday for two weeks that they stopped doing their usual activities; this includes 53% of female high school students, which marks a 14% increase from 2013 to 2023 among this population. These numbers are even starker for teens who identify as LGBTQ+. More than 3 in 5 LGBTQ+ students experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness during the past year,

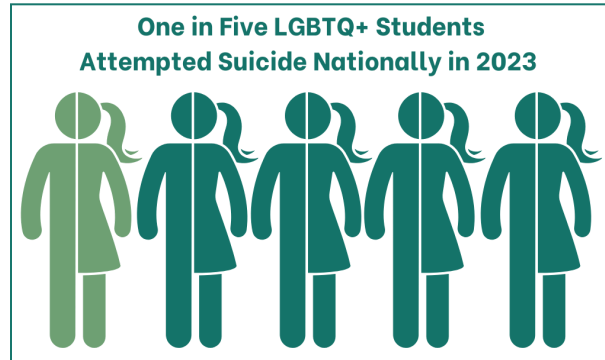
and more than half had poor mental health during the past 30 days. Additionally, 1 in 5 LGBTQ+ students attempted suicide during the past year nationwide (CDC, 2023). In Alaska, the statistics for poor mental health are even higher; 43.2% of youth felt so sad and hopeless almost everyday for two weeks that they stopped doing their usual activities. By disaggregating the data, this represents a 23.2% increase in feelings of sadness and hopelessness among Alaska female students, and a 12.4% increase among Alaska male students between the years of 2011 and 2023 (State *Alaska*, 2023). In Sitka specifically, nearly half of female high schoolers reported feeling so sad or hopeless almost everyday for two weeks that they stopped doing their usual activities; a 25% increase between 2019 and 2023 (State *Sitka*, 2023). And at MEHS, 68.4% of female students and 47.6% of male students reported these same feelings of sadness and hopelessness (State *MEHS*, 2023).



Anecdotally, teens in the Sitka Youth Leadership Committee (SYLC) have shared that mental health is a concern among young Sitkans. They have trouble accessing supports as parent permission is usually required and sometimes a barrier, and there is limited capacity within the school environment to support mental health issues among district students. Young people are telling us in numerous ways that their mental health is in decline and worsening. It’s hard for them to show up to school or to participate in afterschool programs and engage fully in any activity. According to a radio interview on KCAW in March of 2023, the principal of Blatchley Middle School shared that chronic

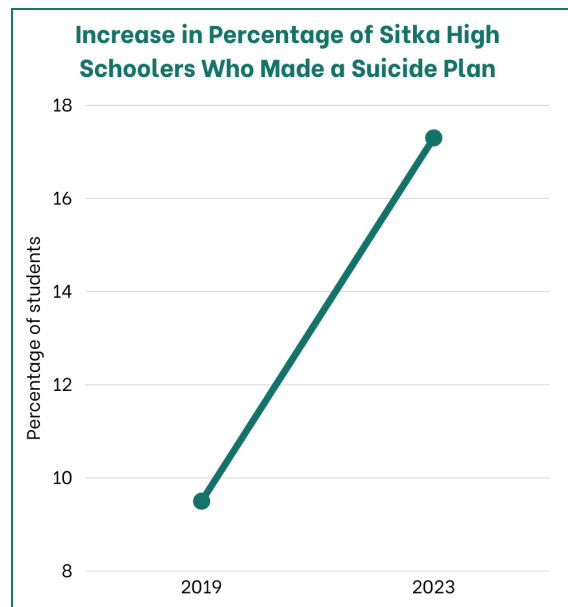
absenteeism²⁹ at his school has increased tremendously from 5% of the student body chronically or severely chronically absent in 2021, to 44% as of March 2023 – from 11 to 117 students (Apathy, 2023). SYLC students report that young people don't know where to turn or how to get help and unfortunately, the messages they often get from adults, and even from their loved ones, is to push through. Many adults confess they don't have the knowledge or tools to provide adequate help. Additionally, mental health providers are seeing an uptick in demand for services amongst both adults and youth, and have shared at community meetings and through informal conversations that agencies are over capacity with long waiting lists.

Struggling with mental health issues can lead to a number of negative outcomes, not only missing school or withdrawing from friends and family, but also engaging in more dangerous behavior such as self-harm. Nationally, 20% of students seriously considered attempting suicide while 16% of high school students made a suicide plan during the past year (CDC, 2023). In Alaska, these numbers are elevated as 22.6% of students seriously considered attempting suicide, and 20.5% made a suicide plan (State *Alaska*, 2023).



Female students were more likely than male students to seriously consider attempting suicide as well as make a suicide plan both nationally and statewide, and LGBTQ+ students or students who had any same sex partners were more likely than their straight

peers to both consider attempting suicide as well as make a suicide plan across the nation³⁰ (CDC, 2023 & State *Alaska*, 2023). Among Sitka High School students alone, 17.3% had made a suicide plan compared to 9.5% in 2019 (State *Sitka*, 2023). The numbers are also concerning at Pacific High School and MEHS, with 29.5% of PHS students and 25.6% of MEHS students reporting having made a suicide plan (State *MEHS*, 2023). Additionally, district wide in Sitka, 30.6% of those who made a plan were American Indian/Alaska Native youth compared to 12.8% of white youth (State *Sitka*, 2023). As stated above, there are a number of ways to support youth to grow into healthy thriving young adults who positively influence others and their community. Youth who have positive



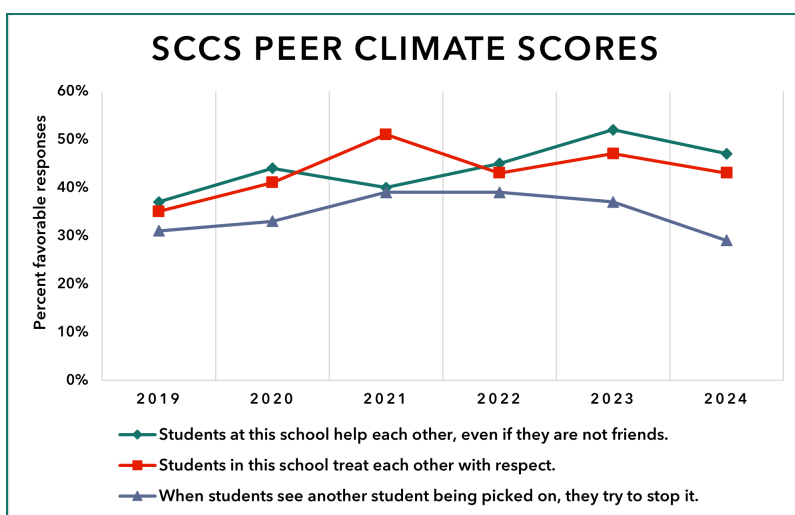
²⁹ A student is considered chronically absent if they miss more than ten percent of school days while being enrolled for at least half a year.

³⁰ Alaska data for LGBTQ+ students is not available, as Alaska does not include this demographic question on their statewide survey.

connections to adult mentors are showing better outcomes overall as they grow and develop. According to the 2023 Sitka SCCS, adult support seems to be adequate with 74% of students agreeing that they have at least one adult at school who they feel comfortable talking to about things that are bothering them; 85% of students can name at least five adults who really care about them; 93% of students know at least one adult who encourages them to do their best outside of school or home. YRBS data supports this as well, with 63% of Sitka high schoolers feeling comfortable seeking help from three or more adults besides their parents with an important question, and 77% of Sitka high schoolers feeling their teachers both care about them and give them plenty of encouragement (State *Sitka*, 2023). While 70.5% of MEHS students feel that their teachers really care about and encourage them, it is important to note that only 47.8% of these same students would feel comfortable seeking help from three or more adults besides their parents if they had an important question affecting their life (State *MEHS*, 2023).

Peer connectedness is another indicator of success for youth development. In Sitka, however, only 52% of students agree that students in their school help each other, even if they are not friends; 47% of students agree that at this school students treat each other with respect; and only 37% of students agree that when students see another student being picked on, they try to stop it³¹ (AASB, 2023). As mentioned earlier in the Key Findings under School Environments, the peer connectedness results are significantly lower than the support youth are getting from adults in their school environment and suggest an area of concern. Meaningful engagement and community service hours are other indicators of success in youth development. Though 43% of students responded favorably to participating in 4+ hours of afterschool and weekend activities, 19% are not involved in anything at all (AASB, 2023). Similarly, 40% of students reported they spend 2+ hours on an average week helping other people without getting paid, while 22% don't contribute any volunteer time at all (AASB, 2023). This suggests an area of concern as a fairly large percentage of students are not involved in anything outside of school at all. In fact, according to the 2023 Sitka YRBS, about 60% of high school

students reported taking part in one or more organized afterschool activities at least one day a week, leaving 40% not involved at all. Disaggregating this data reveals significantly higher rates of involvement among both females (71%) and white students (70%) compared to males (49%) and Alaska Native students (58%). However, opportunities for leadership within school are

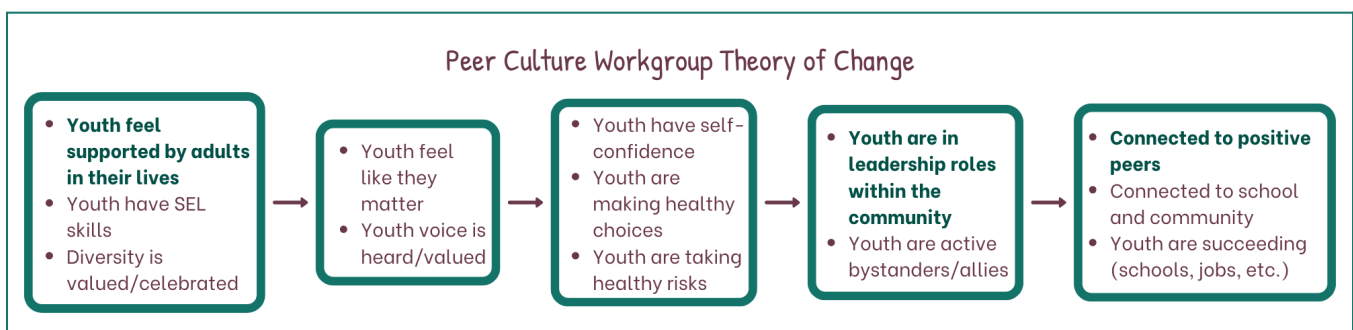


³¹ As of 2024 SCCS data, this number has dropped to 29%.

higher with 79% of students agreeing that students are provided with meaningful opportunities to develop leadership skills, and 74% of students agreeing that at their school they have opportunities to talk to staff about their ideas for school improvements³² (AASB, 2023).

Additionally, having high expectations for oneself, a sense of pride and connection to one’s culture and identity, as well as healthy social emotional skills, indicate positive outcomes for youth. Eighty-one percent of students responded favorably to the SCCS questions, “I try to do well in school,” while 64% of students agreed they set goals for themselves. In response to, “I have a strong sense of belonging to my culture, 14% strongly agree, 44% agree, 24% agree some/disagree some, 12% disagree, and 5% strongly disagree. Seventy-seven percent of students agreed they know what their strengths are. In terms of social emotional skills, 88% of students responded favorably regarding getting along with classmates, while 81% reported knowing what people may be feeling by the look on their face, and 80% agreed they respect a classmate’s opinion during a disagreement (AASB, 2023).

The Pathways Peer Culture Workgroup, formed in 2019, aims to better coordinate and improve partner agency collaborations to be more aligned around youth programming for 6th-12th grade students in Sitka. The workgroup identified three shared outcomes as a focus for the group to collectively mobilize around and track progress towards. These outcomes include adult support for youth, peer connectedness, and leadership opportunities for youth. Using the data to determine priority areas when the group first formed, members noted the 2018 SCCS suggested adult support was adequate (higher than state numbers), whereas peer climate needed to be addressed. Additionally, bullying was high in the schools, drug and alcohol use were worrisome, engagement in extracurricular activities were lacking among a concerning percentage of students, and though students reported high agency in SEL skills, they reported a low belief in their peer climate. Though some of the numbers have shifted slightly and improved since 2018, others remain constant and necessitate concern in the 2023 SCCS (e.g., bullying, peer climate, substance use, lack of engagement in activities). During the focused conversation at the Pathways Steering Committee meeting in 2023, participants identified respectful and meaningful partnerships between youth and adults as a need, as well as establishing better tracking systems to identify which youth are very involved in extracurricular activities, and which youth are falling through the cracks. Establishing a system like this would

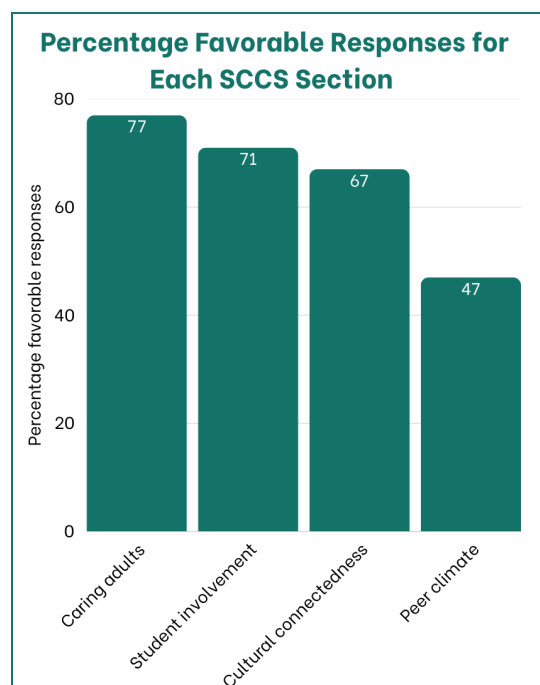


³² As of 2024 SCCS data, this number has dropped to 67%.

help service providers and schools more intentionally reach those who are under engaged.

Recommendations

This year, through SYLC’s Peer Education program’s efforts to increase education around healthy and unhealthy relationships in the school and afterschool setting resulted in an uptick in disclosures among teen participants. Considering the high prevalence of teen dating violence nationally, this was not surprising. As teens become more aware of what an unhealthy relationship is, they begin to recognize when they have experienced it personally or when it has happened to someone close to them. During the school year 2022/2023, there were more disclosures among teens during classroom presentations than in previous years combined, making this an area of concern. Unfortunately, there are minimal systems of support in place for teens who disclose, causing frustration amongst the presenters who encourage their peers to seek help. A potential solution is increasing coordination among schools (admin and counselors), youth-serving agencies, and advocacy agencies like SAFV to ensure there are support systems and clear communication protocols in place if/when disclosures occur.



Another area of concern that surfaced is the status of the peer climate within the school environment. The data has remained constant with some slight improvements from 2018, when the Peer Culture Workgroup first reviewed the SCCS to determine areas of concern and strategies for moving forward. The overall peer climate scores on the SCCS are significantly lower than the other sections of this survey which are generally in the 70-80th percentile range versus the 30-40th percentile range for peer climate, and the 60th percentile range for cultural connectedness.³³ This suggests some obvious areas to work on. It is also interesting to note that students report high agency in social emotional skills, but a low belief in the peer climate. A potential solution would be to work together as partners to ensure opportunities are provided for building connectedness among peers as well as teaching bystander

intervention skills. These strategies could be integrated into the classroom setting as well as into afterschool youth programming. Additionally, the SCCS shows very little change for student engagement in meaningful activities from 2018-2023. Over 40% of students are very involved in extracurricular activities, whereas, close to 20% of students are not involved in any activities at all. According to YRBS data, only 60% of

³³ As of 2024 SCCS data, Peer Climate is the lowest scoring category at 39%, followed by Respectful Climate at 68%. Cultural Connectedness scores have increased to 76%.

Sitka high schoolers are involved in one or more afterschool activities once per week, with only 49% of male students involved (State *Sitka*, 2023). In comparison, 66% of MEHS students are involved in one or more activities per week, including 70% of female students and 61% of male students (State *MEHS*, 2023). Community partners have noted that many of the students who participate in their programs are also involved in various other opportunities in the community causing these students to be over-committed and unable to fully participate in any one program. A potential solution is to develop a tracking system that can be shared across partnerships to determine who is accessing afterschool programming and who is not, and then develop a strategy for better reaching those youth who are consistently under-engaged.

Lastly, the mental health status of young people and the lack of resources and support systems available to them in our community is also a big concern. In this post-pandemic era, youth have shared how much they are struggling with their mental health and feeling hopeless about accessing the help they need. The data shows alarming increases in both the percentage of students who feel sad and hopeless and who made a suicide plan between 2019 and 2023. Students feel isolated and alone, and are left to cope with their circumstances without tools and little guidance from adults. The messages youth often get from adults is to push through. As highlighted in the Key Findings under School Environments, adults are also admitting that they too are struggling with mental health decline and don't have the tools or capacity to help youth in mental health crises (see [SYLC's Mental Health is Health Campaign](#) below).

This increase in mental health struggles could be connected to the increase in substance use among youth, another area of concern. Potential solutions to address these areas of concern are to increase coordination among community agencies/partners to offer training for adults to become more equipped with knowledge/tools to better recognize when a youth needs mental health support and provide the necessary help. Additionally, working together as a community, bringing schools, parents, community partners, and youth together to establish systems and structures that allow for increased visibility, accessibility, and availability to mental health resources is another potential solution.

SYLC's Mental Health is Health Campaign Posters



Needs Statement

Goal 2. Youth Leadership - *Establish meaningful and respectful youth/adult partnerships in order to best support the needs of young people, specifically in regards to establishing a positive peer climate within the schools; mental health supports; concrete systems when disclosures happen; and tracking systems to better reach under involved students in extracurricular activities.*

MALE ENGAGEMENT

Community Needs Assessment



TO ME, BEING...
"To be pr
emotiona
patient, a

Alec Duncan
Naaw Yéil
YOUTH PROGRAM MANAGER

Boys and men are taught
acceptable ways to be a r
healthier, more authentic
their emotions, be vulnera

The next generation is loo
kkaa (man)?

THE NEXT GENERATION IS
LOOKING TO YOU. WHAT WILL
YOU SHOW THEM IT MEANS
TO BE A KĀĀ (MAN)?

ENTER YOUR ANSWER HERE



BOYS WILL BE WHAT THEY SEE.

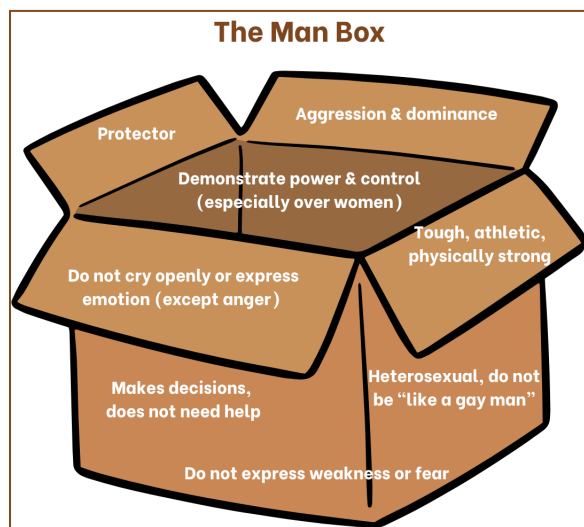


What will you show th
generation about w
means to be a kĀĀ?
"Nurturing
commun
-Michael Mau
Educator & Commu
#BoysWillBe
situpathway

The focus in this section is **male engagement**, which is reflective of Pathways' third goal: Boys and men are proactive within the community in building mutual respect and equality between men and women.

Key Findings

Engaging men and boys in primary prevention is a necessary part of working towards an equitable community, which is why the Pathways Coalition identified this as a goal area. An important piece of this work is understanding how current rigid gender



norms that perpetuate a traditional, Western masculinity ideology have the potential to be detrimental, not only to the men who subscribe to them, but also the people who surround them, such as family and intimate partners. Masculinity ideology is “an individual’s internalization of cultural belief systems and attitudes toward masculinity and men’s roles. It outlines expectations for boys and men to conform to certain socially-sanctioned masculine behaviors and to avoid certain prescribed behaviors” (Levant & Richmond, 2007). In the United States, the dominant masculinity ideology perpetuated by society’s norms, also referred to as the “Man Box,” is rooted in power and

control over everyone and everything. Socially-acceptable behaviors and ways of being include physical strength, not showing emotion, rejecting homosexuality, and exerting power over others, especially girls and women.

When considering the cultural environment in Alaska, there exists a unique kind of masculinity ideology that has all of the same underlying components of the traditional masculinity ideology that makes up the “Man Box,” but they just manifest in different ways as compared to other parts of the country or world. While both are rooted in power and control, the Lower 48’s masculinity ideology is rooted in urbanity, not rurality, like in Alaska. For instance, in the Continental US, society’s “ideal man” would be someone in a suit that is at the top of the corporate ladder. In Alaska, commonly referred to as “The Last Frontier,” the epitome of masculinity is rooted in domination over nature and people, where women, specifically Alaska Native women, were seen by white male colonizers as another resource and territory to be claimed and dominated. It portrays a white, heterosexual, rugged, physically strong man that hunts and fishes to survive in the deep, dangerous wilderness. It is the complete opposite of urban, feminine, and especially Alaska Native, as the relationship to the environment among Indigenous populations is one of symbiosis, not domination. (Hogan & Pursell, 2008)

This rugged, rural Alaskan version of masculinity has been characterized through literature and the tourist industry, as well as television and other media (Hogan & Pursell, 2008). For example, in the documentary series, *Deadliest Catch* (Beers, 2005), a group of “tough” men are featured going out on the unpredictable sea, not showing

weakness or fear, and fishing in dangerous conditions. Another example is *Ice Road Truckers* (Beers, 2007-2017), which follows truck drivers who operate on ice roads, crossing frozen lakes and rivers, in Alaska and Canada. This is similar to *Deadliest Catch* in the way that it portrays another male-dominated, dangerous job where survival in and domination over nature are key to making a living in the rugged state. Media like these set expectations for Alaskans to conform to, as well as create perceptions by outsiders about what a “real Alaskan man” is supposed to



be and do. It illustrates that Alaskans, specifically men, are supposed to be physically strong, fearless, and able to survive in harsh conditions. These expectations of what an Alaskan male should be are perpetuated by everyone, regardless of gender, due to socialization and other influences (e.g., media), and therefore, create pressure to conform to this rigid brand of masculinity for both men and boys.

However, not all societies uphold norms perpetuating a version of masculinity that is rooted in power and control. Different cultural norms lend themselves to varied masculinity ideologies, many of which allow men to be and express the full spectrum of who they are as human beings. Cultural norms permitting men to expand the definition of masculinity beyond being “tough” and “in control” not only result in healthier individuals, but more equitable communities overall (Ragonese et al., 2019). This is seen in Indigenous communities around the world, and specifically in Alaska Native communities, where tribal values and cultural traditions guide and support individuals, including men, to play a significant role in caring for their communities. Respecting self, others, and elders, and learning to provide for community while also sharing leadership roles and decision-making across genders, are cultural norms commonly practiced in these communities (Fiveash et al., 2023). Unfortunately, the expansion of Western

SOUTHEAST TRADITIONAL TRIBAL VALUES

“OUR WAY OF LIFE”

- Discipline and Obedience to the Traditions of our Ancestors
- Respect for Self, Elders and Others
- Respect for Nature and Property
- Patience
- Pride in Family, Clan and Traditions is found in Love, Loyalty and Generosity
- Be Strong in Mind, Body and Spirit
- Humor
- Hold Each Other Up
- Listen Well and with Respect
- Speak with Care
- We are Stewards of the Air, Land and Sea
- Reverence for Our Creator
- Live in Peace and Harmony
- Be Strong and Have Courage

culture brought with it patriarchal norms and practices which severely damaged and disrupted systems of balance among Indigenous communities around the world. See the Key Findings section under Community Environments for more details regarding the impact of colonialism in Alaska. The predominance of rigid gender norms left by colonizers is not only pervasive across Alaska and the United States, but also contributes to harmful outcomes (e.g., violence, addiction, depression, suicide) for both men and boys, as well as entire communities (Ragonese et al., 2019).

Rigid gender norms upholding the traditional Western masculinity ideology have been shown to be a predictor of various kinds of violence, including intimate partner violence (IPV) (Moore & Stuart, 2005). One study in 2014 showed that when men are not able to adapt their masculinity to what is considered socially-acceptable, they experience something called discrepancy stress, which is the gap between one's personal masculinity and that which is prescribed by society (Reidy et al., 2014). The men who experienced this stress were much more likely to have perpetrated intimate

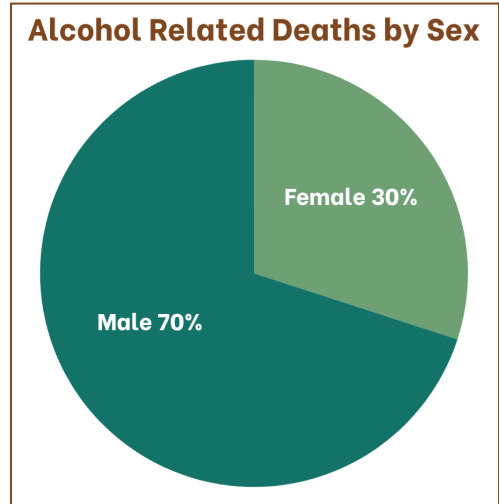


partner violence at some point in their lives, which is consistent with other studies that looked at masculine gender role conformity and its effects on IPV perpetration (Parrott & Zeichner, 2003; Reidy et al., 2009; Moore & Stuart, 2005). It must also be noted that this rigid masculinity ideology is not just predictive of intimate partner violence, but also other kinds of interpersonal violence, including bullying, sexual violence, homicide, and other violent crime (Heilman et al., 2017; Crowther-Dowey & Silvestri, 2017).

When taking into account the traditional masculinity ideology in Alaska and the results from the studies above, it is not surprising that over 75% of women in the state have experienced sexual violence, and about 70% have experienced intimate partner violence in their lifetimes (University of Alaska Anchorage, 2020). Additionally, in 2020, Alaska ranked first among all fifty states in the number of females murdered by males in single victim and single offender homicides, with 55% of those murdered being Alaska Native women, despite only making up about 15% of the state's population (Violence Policy Center, 2022). The state of Alaska is also ranked the second highest in violent crime, which includes the offenses of murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. This rate is about double the national average (Alaska Department of Public Safety, 2023). Of course, this does not mean that traditional masculinity ideology is the only cause for the violence that occurs, but these rigid gender norms, as mentioned previously, have been shown to increase the likelihood of violence.

Another risky behavior that stems from the "Man Box" is excessive alcohol use. Excessive alcohol use refers to drinking in ways that can negatively impact one's health (CDC, 2024). Masculinity norms stipulate that in order "to be a man," you need to

partake in risky behaviors such as binge drinking;³⁴ it is not socially acceptable to just have one drink (Heilman et al., 2017). In the United States, men and boys make up, on average, almost 70% of alcohol-related deaths each year (CDC, 2024). About ⅔ of those deaths are from chronic conditions that developed due to drinking alcohol over time (e.g., cancer, heart disease, alcohol use disorder), whereas ⅓ of the deaths are from drinking too much on one occasion (e.g., motor vehicle accidents, alcohol-related drug overdoses, alcohol poisoning, deaths by suicide) (CDC, 2024). The state of Alaska itself is among the top 15 states with the highest prevalence of binge drinking among adults (America’s Health Rankings, 2023) and has the highest rate of deaths due to alcohol poisoning (NCDAS, 2024). In 2010 alone, excessive alcohol consumption was estimated to cost the state of Alaska \$827,200,000, half of which was paid by various levels of government, with 77.1% of the total cost being attributed to binge drinking (Spears, 2018). Alcohol misuse unfortunately creates a two-fold problem because not only does it cause harm on its own, it also increases risk of/exacerbates poor health outcomes such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, HIV, liver cirrhosis, unintentional injuries, self-harm, violence, and mental disorders (Ragonese et al., 2019; WHO, 2014).



Not only does the pressure to conform to limiting definitions of what it means to be a man result in increases of lashing out toward others, it also has a damaging effect internally, and can adversely impact one’s mental health and sense of self. Men who subscribe to the “Man Box” are more likely to suffer from depression, suicidal ideation, and suicide (Heilman et al., 2017). Much of this is due to trying to be someone that does not align with one’s self or is not attainable; and/or because these norms tell boys and men to suppress their emotions, resulting in a disconnect in understanding and addressing them. For instance, there is a correlation between economic recessions and increased suicides in men (Heilman et al., 2019). This could be because men overwhelmingly perceive themselves as the breadwinners in a household (Heilman et al., 2017), and if they fail, they are failing as men in the eyes of society. Without the skills to navigate these conflicting and hard emotions in a healthy way, depression and suicide are more likely to occur. For instance, men and boys who subscribe to these norms are actually twice as likely to have had suicidal thoughts in the last two weeks than those who do not (Heilman et al., 2017).

It is also important to note that men and boys who do not subscribe to the “Man Box” also face challenges with mental health decline. Rejecting the pressures of societal expectations, whether subconsciously or consciously, very often results in pushback from others, increasing the risk of being bullied and isolated, and thereby

³⁴According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, binge drinking is defined as “a pattern of drinking that brings blood alcohol concentration levels to 0.08 g/dL.” This typically occurs after four drinks for women and five drinks for men in about two hours (NIAAA, 2024).

making it unsafe for men to embrace and express their true selves. This inability to be true to oneself in any setting can increase feelings of self-loathing, depression, and even suicide. Whether inside the “Man Box” or not, men are committing suicide at higher rates than women in the state of Alaska, where men are almost three times more likely to commit suicide than women (America’s Health Rankings, 2021). Additionally, men and boys are also told that seeking help is a sign of weakness, or not “manly,” and, therefore, often do not receive the support they need and instead struggle to deal with these external pressures on their own. Bottling up repressed emotions can and does lead to men taking matters into their own hands, often resulting in self-destructive behavior patterns as well as lashing out at others, as illustrated throughout this Key Findings section.

In 2019, Equipundo and Axe released research that attempted to calculate the annual economic impacts of the “Man Box” in the United States by categorizing six risks attributable to the harmful masculine norms and calculating a cost for each one: (1) bullying and violence, (2) sexual violence, (3) depression, (4) suicide, (5) binge drinking, and (6) traffic accidents (Heilman et al., 2019). In total, even though these are thought to be underestimates of the true number because it is hard to quantify the tangible costs of this traditional masculinity ideology, the “Man Box” costs the United States about \$15.7 billion, which is just over \$43 million each day (Heilman et al., 2019). In Sitka, there have been efforts to counteract the impact of unhealthy

masculinity norms by engaging men as allies and mentors in the prevention work under the Pathways Coalition. However, not only has it been challenging to engage men, the efforts to do so have been carried out mostly by the backbone agency, Sitkans Against Family Violence (SAFV), and not necessarily the collective, despite this being one of the Pathways goals. To better understand why engaging men has been difficult, SAFV conducted a [community readiness assessment \(CRA\)](#) in 2016. Through the CRA, SAFV intended to gain insight on the male perception of domestic violence and sexual assault in Sitka, why men were not participating in male engagement efforts, and how to effectively partner with men in the community. The low stage of readiness (level 2) revealed by the results of this CRA were both eye-opening and validating, suggesting that the existing strategies

Cost category	Estimated economic toll annually in the US
Bullying and violence	\$772,100,000
Sexual violence	\$631,400,000
Depression	\$2,410,300,000
Suicide	\$4,422,500,000
Binge drinking	\$181,090,000
Traffic accidents	\$7,300,400,000
TOTAL	\$15,717,790,000

Dimension	Score	Stage
A: Existing Community Efforts	2.71	Denial/Resistance
B: Community Knowledge of Efforts	2.43	Denial/Resistance
C: Community Climate	1.29	No Awareness
D: Community Knowledge of Issue	2.43	Denial/Resistance
E: Resources for Prevention	2.71	Denial/Resistance
F: Leadership	2.57	Denial/Resistance



implemented to engage men were not meeting them at their level of readiness which was denial/resistance.

Fortunately, the CRA provided suggestions for how to raise the stage of readiness and move from apathy to empowerment and included activities like sharing stories of people affected by the issue, soliciting support from people in SAFV's social network, communicating strategically with opinion leaders and influencers, and sharing accurate information and articles through various channels. In the last 8 years, SAFV has moved forward with many of these suggestions; featuring men in a panel to talk about masculinity norms during a community conversation, providing opportunities for interested men to participate in trainings and/or gatherings around the state to further discuss the issue of masculinity norms and their impact on society and acquire tools for intervening, and highlighting adult men and teen boys in messaging campaigns to help change the narrative around masculinity to be more inclusive and representative (SAFV, 2017).

In 2018, a group of men representing a diverse cross-section of Sitka and who had been involved with SAFV's male engagement efforts in some way were invited to participate in a focus group discussion where they were asked what led them to be involved in past efforts, how SAFV could meaningfully engage them and other men going forward, and what meaningful engagement looked like to them and their peers. Men who participated in this discussion shared that many of them became more acutely aware of harmful gender norms due to having women in their lives who shared their stories and experiences. Exposure to these stories led them to reflect more in-depthly on their own lives, how masculinity norms shaped and influenced them as young boys, and when they themselves unknowingly perpetuated sexist norms. Getting involved with SAFV's male engagement efforts further increased awareness of their own subconscious sexism and fueled the desire to change, as well as provided tools to hold others accountable. They shared that having more access to tools and trainings would help them continue to increase their self-awareness as well as learn how to confront unhealthy masculine behaviors by effectively calling men in. Training and tools would also help them be more proactive and confident in becoming allies and participating in efforts to engage men. Additionally, they unanimously agreed that it is ultimately men's responsibility to hold other men accountable and show up for women, as well as mentor young boys to embrace a more authentic and healthier version of

masculinity. The focus group participants said having spaces where men are able to connect and share with one another, allow each other to be vulnerable, and safely express their emotions without the risk of backlash would help them develop the skills and confidence to show up more authentically as allies and role model a



better way to be a man for younger generations. (SAFV, 2018)

Additionally, men said that they didn't know that they were needed, or what their role could potentially be in preventing violence. Perhaps changing the message or marketing to men about their potential role, how to get involved, and why they are needed is a strategy for reaching more men (SAFV, 2018). Some of this is already happening through the Boys Run I toowú klatseen (BRITK) male mentors media campaign which has not launched yet. This campaign features former male coaches in a film and poster series about how harmful masculinity norms impacted them as young boys, and how a program like BRITK can help change the messages the next generation of boys are receiving. It also serves as a recruiting tool for getting more men involved as coaches for the program. The Sitka Youth Leadership Committee's (SYLC) Mold Your Masculinity campaign is another messaging strategy to help shift the narrative around masculinity norms, where teens of all genders are spotlighted talking about the impacts of these rigid gender norms on individuals and society, with a call to action for men to embrace a healthier, more authentic version of masculinity.

Changing the narrative around masculinity is important, and media can be an effective tool as demonstrated through the various campaigns and messages developed by the SYLC teens and BRITK coaches in recent years. However, portraying men in media as kind, vulnerable, patient, and embracing other qualities counteractive to the dominant masculinity ideology can result in backlash and be perceived as a "war against masculinity" or a "war against men." In 2019, when Gillette created an advertisement playing off its tagline, from "The Best a Man Can Get" to "The Best a Man Can Be," featuring men intervening in sexist behavior (e.g., catcalling, fighting), public outcry was overwhelming with double the amount of dislikes as likes, and both men and women claiming the brand was "emasculating" men (Baggs, 2019). Gillette acknowledged this criticism and instead of shying away from the message, doubled down on their message, even pledging to donate one million dollars annually for three years to various organizations and initiatives supporting positive masculinity (King, 2019).

Lastly, the focus group discussion revealed that there are some perceptions by men in the Sitka community about SAFV that make it difficult to engage men in general, let alone recruit positive male role models. Men felt as though SAFV was not an organization for them or where they are welcome (SAFV, 2018). In the last year, SAFV has become a gender-inclusive shelter, allowing all genders to seek residence if they are fleeing from domestic violence. Men have always been able to seek services from SAFV, but not permitted to stay in the building as it has historically been a refuge for women and children. Since the agency has shifted to becoming gender inclusive, and worked to increase community knowledge and understanding that men can be victims of domestic violence too, SAFV has seen an increase of men seeking services and residence as well as seeking employment at the agency.³⁵ SAFV's strategic communications efforts to rebrand the agency as gender inclusive, coupled with the efforts to message that it is okay for men to ask for and seek help, is helping to invite more male-identifying individuals into the space, whether it be as clients, employees,

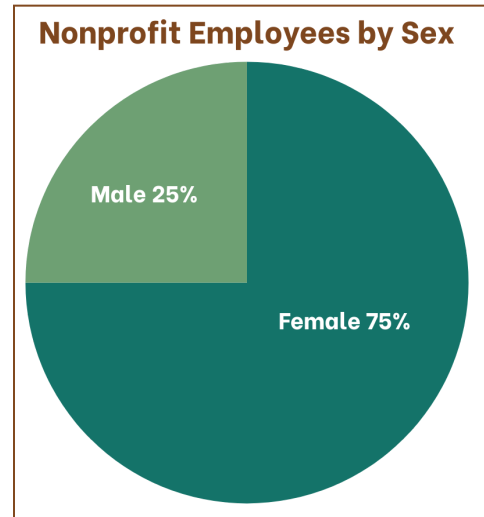
³⁵ There was a 500% increase in the number of male-identifying adults seeking services at SAFV between 2022 and 2024, after the agency became gender inclusive (SAFV, 2024).

or community partners. Additionally, SAFV’s rebranding efforts aim to expand the community’s perception of the agency’s services to include prevention. Helping Sitkans understand the depth and breadth of the work coming out of SAFV and through the Pathways Coalition to engage youth, support families, shift school and community norms, and involve men could help community members, specifically men, identify how to plug in to the work as active participants.

As mentioned above, the work to engage men is currently being driven solely by SAFV, which could be contributing to the challenges of engaging men due to the barriers illustrated about men not feeling welcome or having a place at SAFV. Perhaps, bringing the male engagement work more fully under the umbrella of the entire coalition could help alleviate some of these barriers. Unfortunately, this is easier said than done, as most of the coalition partner agencies are staffed predominately by women³⁶ with few men available to participate in the coalition let alone male engagement work.

Additionally, there is a very clear and well-researched connection between men and their perpetration of violence against women, which makes it easy for people to see the relevance to engage men and boys in prevention through the purview of domestic violence agencies.

The body of research on masculinity norms and their effects on society is rather new; not everyone working in other fields has had access to this research, or has had an opportunity to make the connections and see the relevance of masculinity norms to their specific field. Providing opportunities for coalition members to make these connections could be a good first step in building momentum around engaging men.

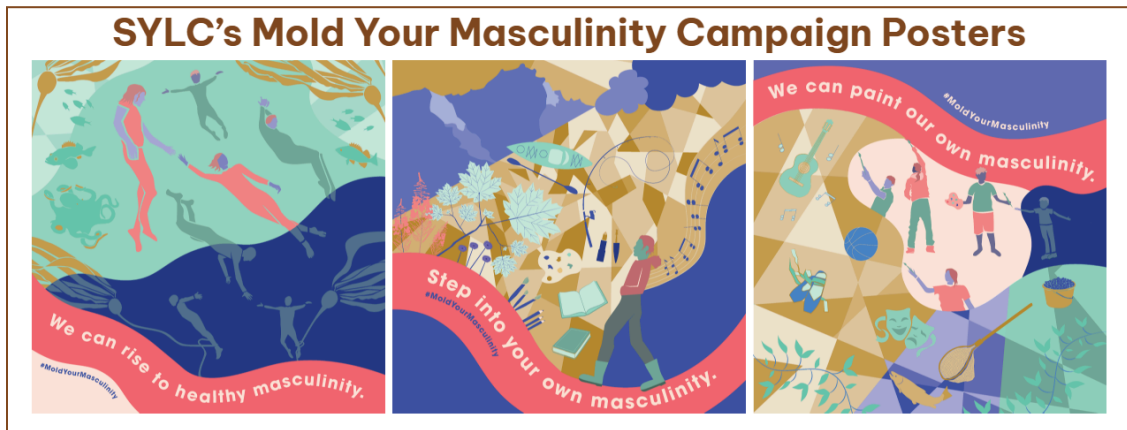


Recommendations

Given the low readiness level of men in Sitka to engage in violence prevention efforts, it is important to continue messaging about harmful masculinity norms and their relevance. As described throughout, the dominant narrative around masculinity is harming everyone, and media messaging is one effective way of bringing awareness to the issue and shifting an individual’s view. Increasing awareness is the first step in creating change in one’s perceptions, beliefs, and ultimately behavior, and until that happens, the likelihood of these harmful masculinity norms being perpetuated remains high. Young boys will grow into men who conform to rigid masculinity norms, believing they are entitled to control and dominate others, resulting in the perpetuation of negative health outcomes seen in communities today. Working to break this cycle is paramount, and messaging is one important piece. Launching the BRITK media campaign mentioned above, could be a good step in engaging the community in conversations about the harmful effects of rigid masculinity norms, and counteracting the messages men and boys receive. Additionally, expanding the messages of the [Mold](#)

³⁶ Women make up about 70–75% of all nonprofit workers (Clerkin, 2024).

[Your Masculinity campaign](#), created by teens in SYLC, could also help bolster opportunities for conversation and reflection.



Despite the low level of readiness, there are men in Sitka who are allies and have engaged in shifting norms, whether formally (e.g., as a BRITK coach) or informally (e.g., as an involved parent). Men who participated in SAFV's focus group (mentioned above), said that while they are more ready to get involved, they need more skill-building and training opportunities to feel prepared and confident in intervening when other men perpetuate behaviors or views stemming from these harmful norms. Working closely with men in the community who have demonstrated readiness to build their capacity, could help leverage other existing male-dominated social networks, where peer role-modeling of a more positive masculinity can occur, influencing more men to shift their views and ideally, their behaviors. Building up a cohort of men who subscribe to and embrace healthier versions of masculinity, will eventually, over time, create a snowball effect; influencing those around them to shift their views and behaviors of what it means to be a man. As momentum builds, and healthier versions of masculinity are role-modeled and accepted, more men and boys will feel confident in embracing their true selves and rejecting unrealistic and harmful societal expectations associated with masculinity.

As previously mentioned in the Key Findings section, there are other versions of masculinity that lend themselves to healthy outcomes. This is demonstrated by Indigenous communities around the world. Working in partnership with Indigenous communities to incorporate cultural values and teachings into efforts targeting boys and men is a potential strategy for expanding society's definition of masculinity from one that is rigid and harmful, to one that is more inclusive and representative. Increasing these efforts and working together across multiple agencies/issues could help curb the negative health outcomes that are currently connected with rigid gender norms.

While there have been some efforts to engage men and boys in prevention work in Sitka, they are mostly driven by one agency and not the collective. This could potentially be because other organizations do not yet see the relevance of these unhealthy masculinity norms to their work. Providing partner organizations with information around how these norms affect their work (e.g., trainings, dialogues, resources) could help create buy-in to collectively move forward around engaging men

and boys as a coalition.

Needs Statement

Goal 3. Male Engagement - Continue messaging about society's unhealthy masculinity norms and their effects. Foster buy-in amongst coalition partner organizations to engage men and boys collectively. Work with existing male allies to engage more men and be mentors to the younger generations. Look to Indigenous cultures for ways of being that lend themselves to healthy individual and community outcomes.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

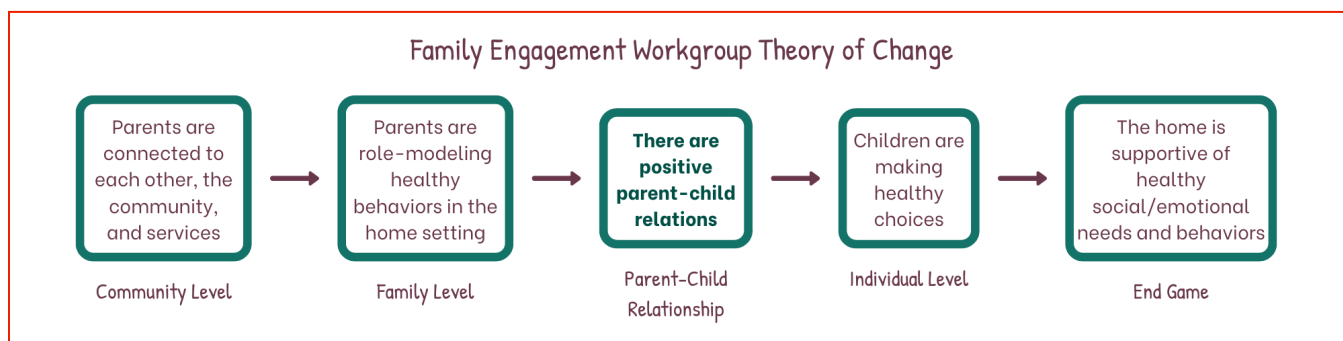
Community Needs Assessment



The focus in this section is **family engagement**, which is reflective of Pathways’ fourth goal: Social service and community agencies have increased the extent to which they promote and foster healthy social-emotional environments.

Key Findings

The Pathways Coalition recognizes family connectedness and a healthy home environment as vital to a child’s well being and potential for healthy growth and development. As social service agencies and individuals in the community, we know that when a child grows up in a home where there is family conflict, negative parent/child relationships, an absent parent, financial stress, and other adversities such as abuse and neglect, that child is much more at risk for negative health outcomes later in life. In Sitka, the Pathways Coalition has identified family connectedness as a shared protective factor, and within the Pathways Family Engagement Workgroup (FEW), uses it as a focal point to collectively mobilize around. Additionally, the Pathways Coalition identified family strengthening as a goal within the community



prevention plan, which aims to see an increase in social services and providers who support and foster healthy social-emotional parenting.

Like many social issues in the state, Alaska’s rates of child abuse are high. According to the Child Advocacy Center through Sitka Tribe of Alaska in Sitka, 37 forensic interviews of youth were conducted due to disclosed abuse between September 2021 and July 2023. In Southeast Alaska, the Office of Children’s Services (OCS) reports that in the year 2023, 654 initial assessments were conducted for child abuse and of those, 167 cases were substantiated after initial assessment. The Children’s Bureau shows that in 2023, there were 2,424 child maltreatment victims statewide, whereas in 2022, there were 2,581 victims. Despite this decrease from 2022



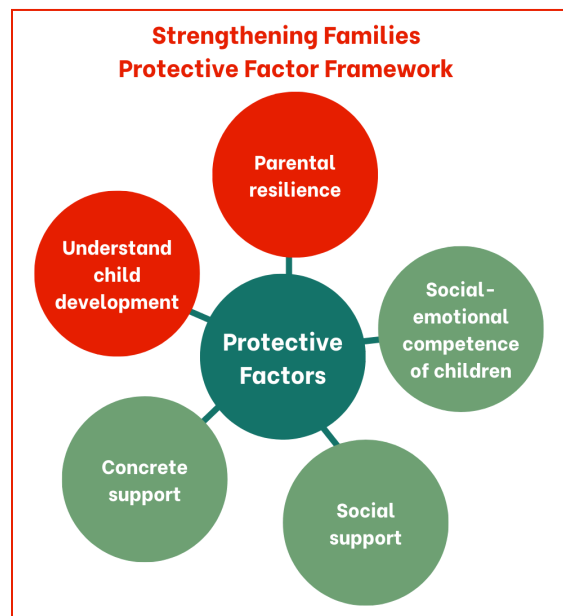
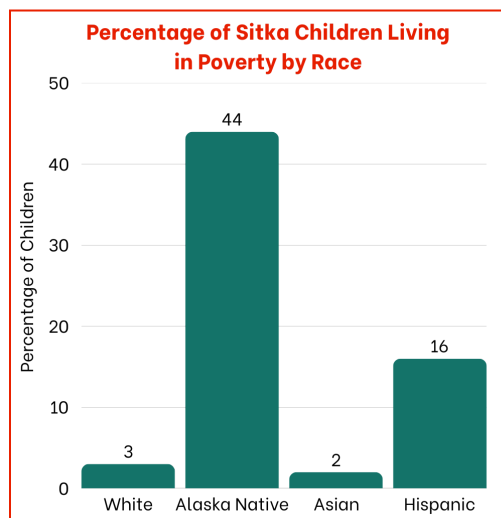
to 2023, Alaska still ranks in the top five states for high rates of child victimization with 14.6 children who were victims of substantiated or indicated maltreatment for every 1,000 children (America’s Health Rankings, 2023).

Growing up in a home where children are exposed to violence further puts them at risk for negative health outcomes as they mature into adolescents and adults. In FY23, SAFV alone provided

residential services to 40 adults and 15 children, totaling 3,422 bednights. Additionally,

SAFV received and responded to 881 crisis calls, and provided 162 individuals with non-residential services.³⁷ In Alaska, 70% of women have experienced intimate partner violence (psychological aggression, coercive control and entrapment, and/or physical violence) in their lifetime. About 20% of Alaska women experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) in 2020 alone (University of Alaska Anchorage, 2020). Alaska remains high in rates of intimate partner violence compared to the nation, as mentioned in other sections under the Key Findings.

Financial instability also puts undue stress on families and negatively impacts the home environment, in particular, the relationships between parents as well as how parents or guardians relate to their children. In Alaska, children whose parents lack secure employment is 32%; children living in households with a high housing cost burden is 28%, and children living in poverty is 14% (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2024). In Sitka, the number of children living in poverty by race is as follows: 3% white, 44% Native American/Alaska Native, 2% Asian, and 16% Hispanic (University of Wisconsin, 2023). Additionally, the Sitka School District reports that 35.5% of students enrolled in the district were eligible for free and reduced lunches which indicates the percentage of families who are low income in the community³⁸ (Sitka School District, 2023).



The [Strengthening Families Protective Factor Framework](#) offers insight as to what specifically sets families up for a healthy home environment, prevents child abuse and neglect, and helps families feel supported. The five protective factors at the foundation of this strengthening-families model include: concrete supports in times of need, social connections, social-emotional competence in children, parental resilience, and knowledge in parenting and child development. Conversations that take place at home between guardians and children regarding

³⁷ As of FY24, SAFV provided residential services to 48 adults and 16 children, totaling 6,219 bednights. Additionally, they received and responded to 294 crisis calls, and provided 104 individuals with non-residential services.

³⁸ As of 2024, 31% of students enrolled in the district were eligible for free and reduced lunches, however, two-thirds of families did not apply; the percentage of families who are eligible is likely higher. SSD intends to do an outreach campaign to reach and enroll more eligible families. In the school year 2025/2026, 34% of SSD students were eligible.

what the child is learning at school or after school is an indicator of family connectedness. In Sitka, 99% of parents who took the SCCS responded favorably to the question, “how often do you have conversations with your child about what they are learning at school” (79% said daily, 18% said weekly); 80% responded favorably to the question, “how often do you connect activities that you do at home with what your child is learning at school (20% daily, 36% weekly, 24% 1-2 times/month), whereas close to 20% make minimal connections to what they are learning at school or none at all. In regard to how often parents/guardians have conversations with their child about career or college preparation, 62% responded favorably, (8% daily, 21% weekly, 32% 1-2 times/month), but close to 40% have minimal conversations or none at all regarding post-secondary opportunities (AASB, 2023).³⁹

The Pathways Family Engagement Workgroup (FEW), which began in 2016, works to coordinate efforts aimed at helping families to be more connected to their community and to each other. Since 2021, FEW has implemented an activity series called the Sheet’ká Family Challenge which provides free and fun events for families over a 12-week period each spring. In the spring of 2023, 78 families registered for the Challenge with 143 youth and 162 adults participating in activities and in 2022, approximately 66 families registered for the Challenge. Results from the 2022 post Challenge parent survey (completed by 23 parents/guardians) showed that 65% of families reported spending more time together and 35% said they engaged in more conversation with their child as a result of participating in Challenge activities. Parents reported that being outdoors, interacting with other families, meeting new people, and spending time together were some of their favorite moments of the Challenge. One parent shared,



“These events really help our family feel connected to our community. Without this connection to Sitka, we might otherwise choose to move to where we are closer to relatives and the cost of living and affordable housing are more accessible.”

The 2023 parent survey results have also been analyzed and show similar results in support of the workgroup’s goals of increasing connections among family members and access to family-oriented opportunities. Notable quotes from the 2023 parent survey include:

“Trying new activities creates a special bond between me and my family”;
“These Challenges are important to my family because they help introduce young kids to the many opportunities for growth, connection, and learning within our community”; and *“[These activities] make it affordable to do things.”*

³⁹ SCCS data from 2024 shows similar results.

FEW engaged in a gap analysis in the spring of 2023 to assess the gaps in the community in terms of the community's family engagement efforts. Using the Strengthening Families Protective Factor Framework as a reference and guide for

What We Learned: Protective Factors
Sitka is lacking in two areas of the Strengthening Families Protective Factor Framework

- Social Connections
- Concrete support in times of need
- Social and emotional competence of children

- ★ **Parental Resilience**
- ★ **Knowledge of parenting and child development**

discussion, FEW determined that Sitka is doing a good job initiating opportunities for social connections by coordinating efforts like the Challenge. Additionally, the workgroup identified numerous efforts offered by agencies in Sitka to provide food and other basic needs for families who are struggling, particularly during the COVID pandemic (concrete support in times of need), as well as efforts that support social-emotional competence

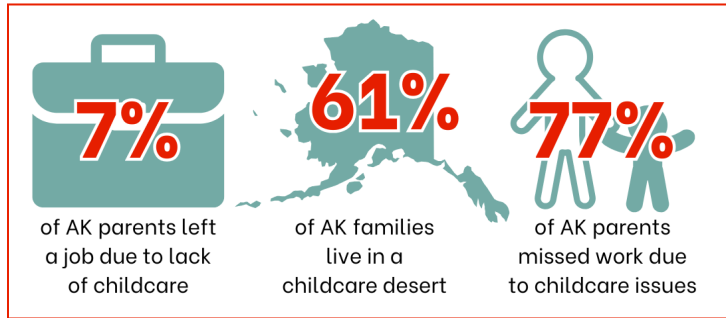
in children. The two areas that surfaced during this process and indicated a gap in coordinated efforts were around parental resilience and knowledge in parenting and child development.

There are several parent-focused courses offered in Sitka each year, providing opportunities for parents to develop parenting skills and learn how to best engage with their child. One program called, Circle of Security, is implemented twice a year by Center for Community's Early Learning Program in partnership with the Sitka School District and Sitka Counseling. This evidence-based program is for parents of children up to age 5 and helps parents meet their child's emotional needs (Circle of Security, 2023). In 2022, the program had a small pool of participants with only 10 individuals enrolled between the two eight-week sessions. In 2021, there were 22 participants total, and pre-COVID there were approximately 8 participants per session (total 16), indicating a fairly small pool of parents and guardians taking advantage of this resource. Additionally, 40-50% of participants are required or highly encouraged by Office of Children's Services (OCS) to participate in this program, meaning there are very few parents voluntarily opting in. There are other parenting opportunities offered in the community, such as Sitka Tribe of Alaska's Fatherhood/Motherhood is Sacred, which are both offered 1-2 times a year and enroll 2-4 participants per session. Though a handful of opportunities are offered each year for parents/guardians to build their skills and knowledge as caregivers, it is clear participation is minimal suggesting parents/guardians may be too busy, overwhelmed, or simply lack the capacity/means to engage.

Providing support for parents to gain knowledge in skills in parenting and child development rose up as a need to address in our community. Additionally, the gap analysis conducted by FEW revealed that supporting parental resilience is another need and area to address going forward. Some efforts to support parental resilience have occurred in past years, but nothing has been sustainable.

Additionally, lack of childcare in Sitka came up at the Pathways Steering Committee meeting as another area of concern around the family goal; however, another group, the Early Childhood Coalition, is making progress in this area. Sitka's Early Childhood Coalition (ECC) discovered through their assessment in March of 2023

that 8 daycare and preschools exist in Sitka with 170 children between 2 months and 5 years old enrolled. The ECC estimates that there are over 1000 children in this age range in Sitka. Two of the preschools (3-5 years) had openings in March for half days only, while all of the others had no vacancies. Additionally, childcare workers are paid a mediocre wage, contributing to understaffed facilities and a limit to how many children agencies can take in.



In Alaska, the US Chamber of Commerce Foundation (2021) found that 7% of parents left a job due to lack of childcare availability, 77% of parents missed work due to childcare issues, and 61% of Alaskan families live in a childcare desert. The annual cost of childcare in Alaska is more than the annual tuition and fees at UAA, UAS, and UAF. As a result, parents are leaving the workforce to stay home with young children (Child Care Coalition of Alaska, 2023). The ECC concluded that more licensed facilities in Sitka that can take infants and toddlers are needed, as well as preschool-aged children. Building the industry of workers in Sitka to allow existing facilities to operate at higher capacity is also another need.⁴⁰ The ECC is the primary driver working with the city to move things forward in the area of childcare needs in Sitka; therefore, Pathways will continue to support their efforts as necessary.

Recommendations

Families do best when they have their basic needs met, engage socially, have positive connections among family members, have support and respite, and utilize effective parenting strategies while engaging with their children. The Family Engagement Workgroup identified two areas of need during their gap analysis discussion to better support families. One is supporting parental resilience, and the other is connecting families with parenting resources and information on child development. In Sitka, there are minimal opportunities for parents/guardians to access helpful resources for parenting their children. There are two known courses offered throughout the year, but participation is low and some parents are mandated to attend by OCS. One potential solution is to work with parents/guardians to determine what resources they would like as well as how they would like to



⁴⁰ Xóots Yadi, a tuition-based preschool program through Sitka School District, was piloted in 2025. State and tribal childcare subsidies help fund this program.

acquire those resources. Additionally, community partners could work together to integrate parent resources into other settings (e.g., parent/teacher conferences, integrating information via program newsletters sent home, family dialogues offered by the school). Another area of concern impacting families is the lack of affordable and accessible childcare in Sitka. A separate community coalition has made this need a priority and focus of their work, therefore the Pathways Coalition will support efforts to address this issue but not be the primary driver.

Needs Statement

Goal 4a. Family Engagement - *Work with parents/guardians to establish community opportunities that build parental knowledge and skill in their children's development, as well as increase parental resilience. Ensure that families have equal access to these opportunities as well as other family engagement opportunities in Sitka.*

COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTS

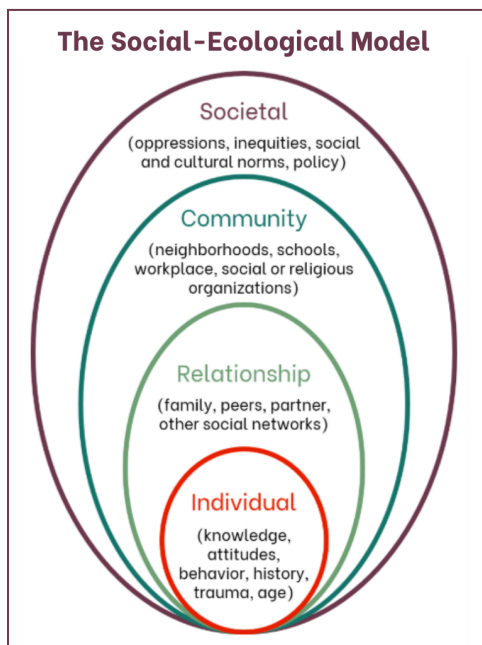
Community Needs Assessment



The focus in this section is **community environments**, which is reflective of Pathways' fourth goal: Social service and community agencies have increased the extent to which they promote and foster healthy social-emotional environments.

Key Findings

While much of the work done as a coalition revolves around the individual and interpersonal (relationship) levels of the Social-Ecological Model (SEM), it is also important to address the overarching societal level that governs the sphere of social norms we all live in. This section therefore takes a “zoomed out” approach as compared

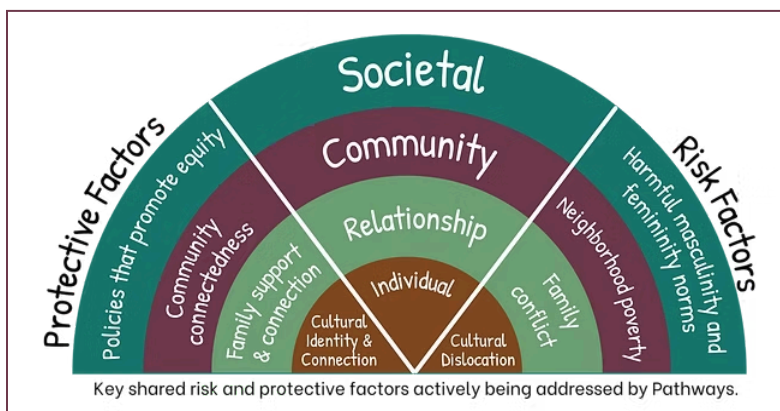


to the other sections in this CNA, as we recognize that in Alaska specifically, it is critical to acknowledge the community-wide norms that underlie shared risk factors.

The “Alaskan mentality,” one of rugged individualism, is embedded within the history of the state. Terms such as the “The Last Frontier” reinforce this cultural narrative of carving civilization out of vast wilderness, being dominant, tough, and self-reliant. As highlighted in the Male Engagement section, these themes coincide with what society deems as masculine. Alaska’s history of white settlement engrained the idealistic bootstraps narrative deep into the state’s reputation; resistance to government intervention, and the belief that hard work is all one needs to succeed. Unfortunately, this fails to account for the reality of widespread inequity, and it places the blame on the individual without recognizing the oppressive weight of systemic barriers they are

under. This mentality can dangerously undermine availability of support and resources, as it plays into policy-making and even more abstract societal norms such as whether vulnerability is welcomed, and whether a network of social support and empathy exists for suffering, a very real human experience.

All of this to say, this umbrella of societal beliefs has a trickle-down effect into the lack of infrastructure, resources, and policies meant to enhance protective factors and prevent risk factors across the state. Changing community-wide norms is a large, abstract task; it cannot be done through individual efforts. This is why it is critical that we examine and acknowledge shared risk and protective factors to enhance



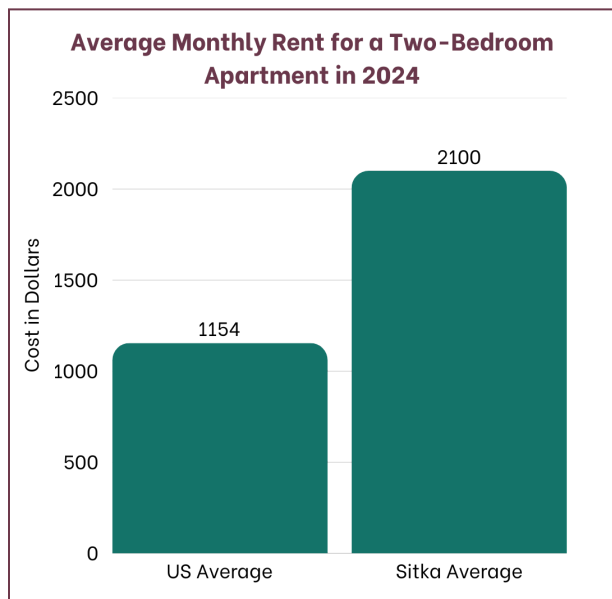
community buy-in, as working together and pooling the resources we do have is critical to combating this self-reliant narrative. The Pathways [shared risk and protective factors](#) framework highlights this using pooled data; it identifies where individual, interpersonal, and community-level factors coincide with outcomes that each organization is working to address. The significant overlap within this chart serves as the framework for the Pathways Coalition as a whole: more concerted efforts lead to more expansive impact. Acknowledging risk and protective factors across agencies also supports Pathways' fourth goal of building the extent to which social service and community agencies promote and foster healthy social-emotional environments.

This CNA section will zoom in on economic stress, mental health and substance use, violence, and the disparities that exist within these issues to highlight the tangible impacts of community norms, and how these outcomes are *both causes and effects* of each other; calling for a wraparound, collective impact approach.

A prominent community factor that contributes to poor outcomes is economic stress. This is a widespread issue across Alaska, and its impacts are compounded in remote areas such as Sitka. In 2022, inflation rates in Alaska hit a 41-year high of 8.1%. As of 2023, inflation in Alaska has slowed to 1.5%, a more normal rate compared to the US average. However, the cost of living remains high (Alaska Department of Labor & Workforce Development, 2023). In Sitka specifically, the cost of living is 37.5% higher than the US average (US Department of Agriculture [USDA], 2024); Sitka also has the highest rental rate out of any surveyor borough in Alaska at \$1,537/month⁴¹ (Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, 2024). These astronomical rental costs are largely due to the increase of short-term rentals and seasonal housing like AirBnB and vacation homes. Another factor wrapped up in the high cost of living is food insecurity. Approximately 95% of the food Alaskans purchase is imported, and Alaska is at the end of the supply chain for goods and food coming from the West Coast (USDA,

2024). Supply chain interruptions coupled with Sitka's geographic location tend to spike the costs of foods; another expense Sitka residents must account for.

High cost of living further contributes to houselessness, a very pressing risk factor in any community. It's estimated around 15 Sitka residents are chronically houseless, but the actual number of people experiencing houselessness is assumed to be much greater as many people couch surf, sleep in their cars, or don't report their housing status (McKinstry, 2021). In addition, almost a quarter of Sitka's homeowners and half of its renters spend a third or more of their income on housing costs (Woolsey, 2023). This is a challenge when the livable wage in Sitka is high,



⁴¹ Adjusted average rent for all Sitka units increased to \$1,648 per month in 2024.

specifically for families. According to the Living Wage Calculator by Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the livable wage for one adult in Sitka is \$36,358 after taxes. However, for a single parent with one child, the livable wage jumps to \$73,216 after taxes, with subsequent increases in livable wage with each additional child⁴² (Glasmeier, 2023). This leaves nearly 7% of Sitka residents below the poverty line (United States Census, 2021), which disproportionately impacts families with 35.5% of Sitka students eligible for free/reduced lunch⁴³ (Sitka School District, 2023).

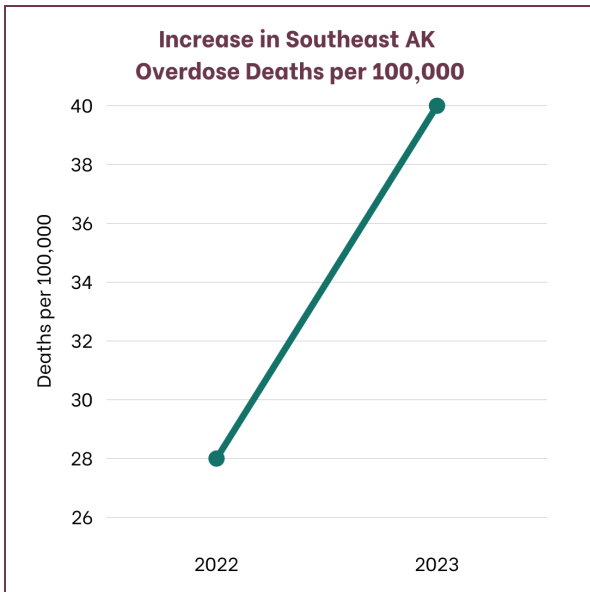
These aforementioned economic factors are drivers of poverty in Sitka, as they decrease accessibility to resources. And one's level of economic security is directly linked to many poor health outcomes; including mental health decline, substance use, and violence. For example, those in poverty are at increased risk for mental illness, chronic disease, higher mortality, and lower life expectancy (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2024). Research also demonstrates that higher financial worries are significantly associated with higher psychological distress and perpetration of intimate partner violence (Ryu & Fan, 2023). In fact, a 2016 study found that for each additional financial stressor, the odds of severe physical IPV increased 1.27 times (Schwab-Reese et al., 2016). And in terms of substances, dominant relapse themes include life stressors, such as one's financial status. Substances can also be a coping mechanism to combat this stress, and they play into the likelihood of violence occurring. Overall, economic stress is a leading risk factor for numerous poor health outcomes, which is why its prominence in Sitka cannot be ignored when working towards societal-level solutions.



As mentioned, poor mental health and substance use have a community-wide impact in Sitka. According to County Health Rankings, residents of Sitka have more poor mental health days than the nationwide average, with a rate of about 4.9 over the last 30 days (University of Wisconsin, 2023). In addition, Alaska has the second highest rates of suicide in the US at 27 per 100,000 deaths (CDC, 2022). Coupled with poor mental health, both Sitka and Alaska have disproportionately high rates of substance use. Alaska has the nation's second-highest number of alcohol-related deaths per capita, and the highest rate of female deaths (Drug Abuse Statistics, 2024). The rate of excessive drinking in Sitka is over 20%, which is 3% higher than the national average

⁴² As of 2024 data, livable wage for one adult has increased to \$42,577 and to \$80,337 for a single parent with one child after taxes. High cost of living continues to contribute to widespread economic disparities.

⁴³ As of 2024, 31% of students enrolled in the district were eligible for free and reduced lunches, however, two-thirds of families did not apply; the percentage of families who are eligible is likely higher. SSD intends to do an outreach campaign to reach and enroll more eligible families. In the school year 2025/2026, 34% of SSD students were eligible.



(University of Wisconsin, 2023). And this problem seems to be worsening across Alaska. Since 2015, the 5-year average annual rate of excessive alcohol deaths per capita increased by as much as 45% (Drug Abuse Statistics, 2024), and the Southeast overdose rate increased from 28.3 to 40.1 deaths per 100,000 between 2022 and 2023 alone (Alaska Department of Health, 2023). The impact of substance use stretches into taxpayer dollars as well; Alaska taxpayers spent \$827.2 million as a result of excessive alcohol use in 2010. Adjusted for inflation, this is equivalent to \$1.17 billion or \$3.04 per drink in 2022 US dollars (Drug Abuse Statistics, 2024).

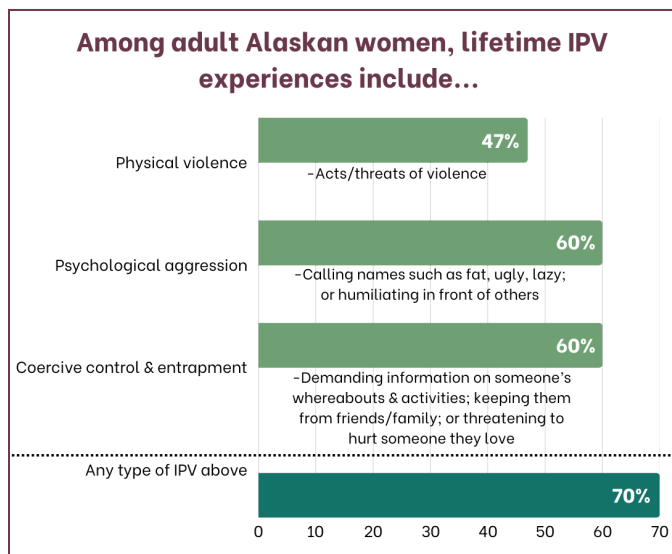
It is important to acknowledge the potential reasons why these high numbers persist in remote locations such as Sitka. First, lack of access to healthcare is a major risk factor; 17% of adults in Sitka are uninsured, compared to 12% of adults across the US (University of Wisconsin, 2023). Both mental health and substance use interventions require a support network; one that is increasingly inaccessible without health insurance and access to medical professionals due to Sitka’s remote location. In addition, the interconnectedness of community members, while a protective factor, does mean that grief is felt community-wide. Recently, Sitka has experienced significant loss of prominent community members and youth. And in a small town, a heavy concentration of loss has a compounded effect on the wellbeing of its people. This highlights the critical need for widespread access to community mental health resources and supports across Sitka.



As mentioned, mental health and substance use are not isolated issues; but rather ones that intertwine with a myriad of additional poor outcomes. Recent research indicates that up to 75% of individuals who begin treatment for a substance use disorder report having engaged in physical assault, mugging, using a weapon to attack another person, and other violent crimes. In addition, alcohol or drug use is involved in 40-60% of domestic abuse situations (American Addiction Centers, 2024). Former Sitka Police Department Lieutenant, Lance Ewers, highlights this issue stating that his department responds to multiple domestic violence cases a week, often committed by repeat offenders with drugs and alcohol involved. Ewers remarked, “In my law enforcement career, I couldn’t even begin to count how many domestic violence investigations I’ve conducted, and I could probably count on both hands how many didn’t have an alcohol nexus to it. Or a drug nexus to it. It was a sober domestic disturbance. And I’ve been a cop since 1999”

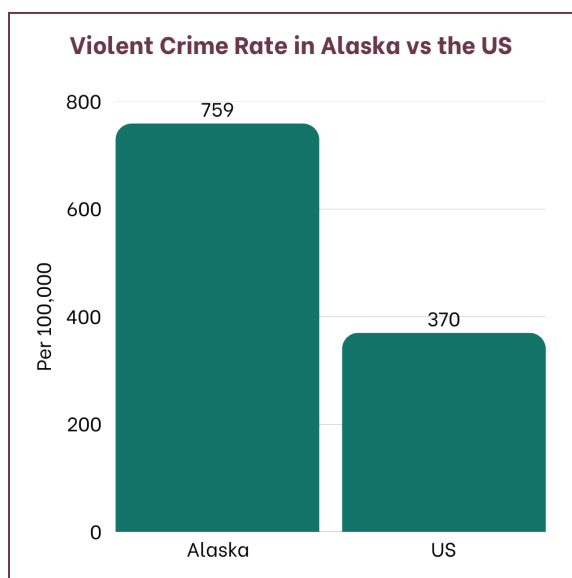
(Cassandra, 2018). While it is important to account for the relationship between domestic violence and substance use when they co-occur, it is equally important that the perpetrator is always held accountable, regardless of the involvement of substances.

Overarchingly, economic stress, poor mental health, and substance use are intertwined in a way that contributes to a decline in community wellbeing and an increase in violent outcomes. As mentioned, it is therefore critical to address the involvement of each issue when reflecting on how poor outcomes such as violence play out in Sitka.



Violence is a widespread and deeply-rooted issue across the state of Alaska, and it is prevalent in Sitka. As highlighted in the Family Engagement Key Findings, the SAFV shelter alone provided 3,422 bednights for individuals and families fleeing domestic violence in FY23⁴⁴. Statewide, Alaska remains high in rates of intimate partner violence (IPV) as compared to the rest of the nation with 70% of Alaskan women experiencing IPV (psychological aggression, coercive control and entrapment, and/or physical violence) in their lifetime (University of Alaska Anchorage, 2020). In addition, over

30% of Alaskan men have experienced IPV, sexual violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetimes (University of Alaska Anchorage, 2022). Violent crime rates also soar above the national average, with Alaska having significantly higher rates of murder, rape, and aggravated assault. In 2022, Alaska's violent crime rate was double that of the US; Alaska's was 758.9 per 100,000 people, whereas the United States's was 369.8 (Alaska Department of Public Safety, 2023).



Again, these excessive rates of violence across Alaska call into question the kinds of community-wide norms that exist to perpetuate these kinds of numbers. Violence is a cyclical issue; children exposed to violence are more likely to misuse drugs, suffer from mental health issues, and engage in criminal behavior as adults,

⁴⁴ In FY24, this increased drastically to 6,219 bednights.

which also renders them more likely to experience financial challenges (National Institute of Justice, 2016). As mentioned, the interconnected nature of these risk factors poses each as *both* a cause *and* effect of violence. It is therefore evident that at the root of this cycle are larger, systemic, societal-level norms that continue to perpetuate these patterns regardless of attempts to address singular issues at a time. Perhaps this is why these kinds of attempts can feel like putting a bandaid on a missing limb; there is a disconnect between proposed solutions and the extensive root causes. And in terms of acknowledging root causes, an equitable solution-oriented approach recognizes that these risk factors are inequitable by nature; their impact is compounded among certain demographics due to a history of systemic injustices.

We cannot discuss equitable, holistic solutions without first addressing the disparities that exist in these issues. In relation to economic stress, there are both significant gender and racial/ethnic disparities in earnings. The average woman working in Alaska loses around \$530,000 in wages in her lifetime, and the average college-educated woman in Alaska loses an average of \$800,000 in lifetime earnings. Additionally, women in the non-profit sector make only \$0.79 for every dollar earned



by their male counterparts (The Foraker Group, 2020). In a town like Sitka, with over 100 non-profit organizations and SEARHC's non-profit hospital (the largest employer on the island), the gender wage gap severely impacts the female population.

Furthermore, the largest demographic of Sitka residents living in poverty is females aged 35-44, who are also the largest demographic to be single mothers (United

States Census, 2021). Financial instability connects to domestic violence in that it often limits one's ability to leave an unhealthy relationship; further highlighting the interconnectedness of economic stress and violence.

Beyond gender disparities, American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) populations are twice as likely to experience food insecurity as their white counterparts (USDA, 2024), and they earn about \$0.83 for every dollar made by a white individual in Alaska (US Department of Labor, 2024). In relation to mental health and substance use, AI/AN individuals have much higher rates of PTSD, addiction, and suicide than the general population. These high numbers coupled with low mental health resource utilization rates by AI/AN populations are evident of a variety of social determinants of health that disproportionately impact them: lack of trust in healthcare settings due to historical trauma, lack of access due to remote/low-income areas, lack of transportation, lack of health insurance, etc. (Leavitt et al., 2018). In addition, the highest age-adjusted mortality rate was observed among American Indian/Alaska Natives, who were 3.6 times as likely to die from alcohol-related causes compared to Non-Hispanic white individuals (Karaye et al., 2023). And while the rates of overdose among white individuals decreased from 2021 to 2022, it increased by about 15% among Alaska Natives (CDC, 2024).

As highlighted, these risk factors predispose individuals to violence. In some research, the reported rates of domestic violence against American Indian and Alaska

Native individuals is up to 10 times higher than against other demographics in the United States (Indian Law Resource Center, 2022). And even though Alaska Natives make up only 20% of Alaska’s population, they also make up 54% of sexual assault victims throughout the state (Cotsirilos, 2017). It is also important to acknowledge that domestic violence can occur in both same-sex and opposite-sex relationships. Both bisexual women and men report the highest rates of IPV within the LGBTQIA+ community, with over 61% of bisexual women and 37% of bisexual men experiencing IPV in their lifetimes. Due to stigma and fear of discrimination, the true prevalence of domestic violence and IPV within the LGBTQIA+ community may be underreported (Human Rights Campaign, 2022). These harrowing statistics, and specifically the disparities behind them, are again evidential of larger social issues at play.



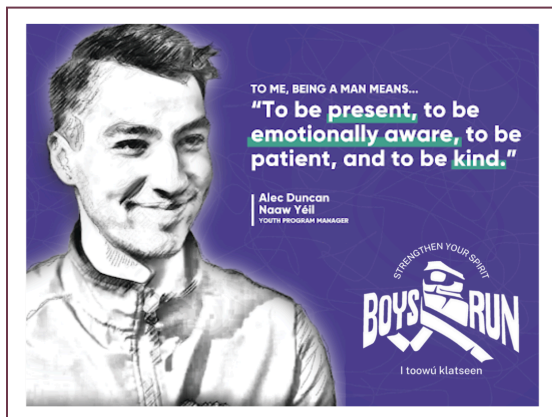
Much of these outcomes can be traced back to the long-term impact of colonialism. As Westerners from around the globe ventured north to Alaska, disease spread, decimating communities of Alaska Native populations across the state. Additionally, cultural dislocation – the displacement of families from their homelands and children in an effort to force Indigenous children into boarding schools – further contributed to the breakdown of these intact, well-functioning communities. Assimilation, criminalization of cultural practices and traditions, exploitation of resources, enslavement, and abuse are all linked to the higher rates of suicide, substance use, sexual assault, homicide, and chronic illness that affect Alaska Native people more than any other racial group in Alaska (Indian Health Service, 2019). Concerted efforts to acknowledge and address the impact of colonialism community-wide is a step in creating space for healing from the intergenerational impact of forced assimilation. Several groups in Sitka are already prioritizing this through community education and conversations, as well as through awareness building strategies. However, working more proactively to effectively decolonize systems and promote racial justice and equitable environments is critical and necessary to improving health outcomes in Sitka, specifically violence.

Recommendations

As mentioned, societal level work is critical in creating sustainable, lasting impact. However, it can feel like the most abstract and daunting work. It is difficult to know how to shift things on such a large scale. After all, there are very real barriers in which this work must be navigated; lack of resources being a predominant one. And while it is easy to allow these realities to limit and even halt progress altogether, in an

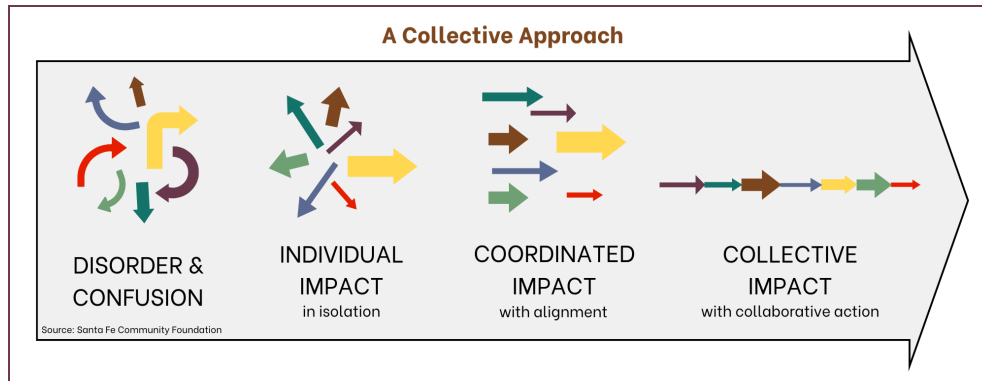
effort to treat them as obstacles rather than stop signs, it is critical to pose the question: what *can* we do as a collective?

First, an individual approach is not serving us. To combat the individualism comprising part of the aforementioned “Alaskan mentality,” organizations can pool resources rather than competing for them. This starts with acknowledging the highlighted shared risk and protective factors in which each organization has a stake. Even this recognition – that all of our work is interconnected – has the potential to begin a shift in community norms, which drastically influence where money goes. Nonprofit work tends to be activity-oriented, which is very valid within the reactionary culture present in the US. However, holding singular events, while good for awareness-building, tends to spread organizations thin, which can lead to personnel burnout and failing to address issues at depth. This becomes cyclical and likely contributes to turnover rates, something Sitka’s nonprofits are all too familiar with. Instead, with the shouldering of this work across agencies, organizations can commit to doing less, more intentionally.



Examples of this kind of collective approach already exist among Pathways partners. Youth programs that encourage healthy masculinity and self esteem, and promote diversity like Boys Run I toowú klatseen, have the potential to change the culture to one that promotes healing, respect, and community, while also curbing negative health outcomes such as binge drinking, alcohol consumption, and drug use in boys and men. And this has become all the more effective with community-wide partnerships. Partner organizations providing coaches as positive adult role models,

expertise in trauma-informed behavior support, and other resources expand and deepen the impact of this program. In addition, the Pathways Coalition has been working together to improve cultural and community connectedness to build family resilience against these aforementioned negative health outcomes. Efforts include the highly successful Sheet’ká Family Challenge which invites local organizations to host free, fun, family programs and activities under one umbrella for Sitka families to attend to encourage bonding. The coalition’s commitment to resource and service coordination to achieve their common goal of increasing opportunities for family connectedness, is fortified by these partnerships. By maximizing efficiency of organizational resources, time, messaging, and programming across the coalition, this partnership serves as a protective factor in Sitka because it provides a wraparound approach. Not only do we reach more families with the collective’s clientele, but the depth of the impact is compounded because numerous goals and perspectives are brought to the table.

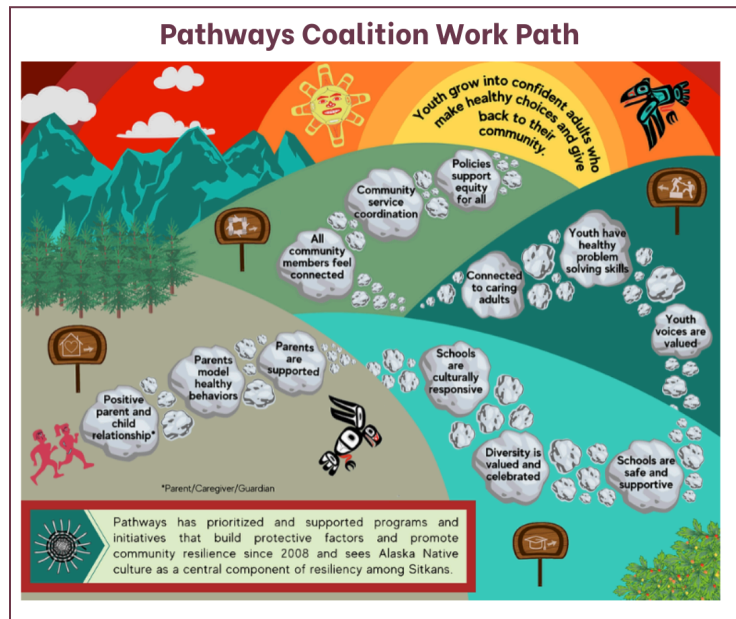


In regards to nonprofit staff turnover specifically, creating environments in which staff feel valued and supported at work is critical. Staff’s needs must be met in order for the larger community work to become a priority, and in order to keep high retention rates that contribute to efficiency in working towards these shared goals. A way to ensure this is through a thorough examination of organizational practices, policies, and norms. Uncovering the reason *why* staff retention is low within organizations is the first step in identifying solutions. Perhaps looking at wages as compared to inflation rates, or the level of internal structures that exist to support staff, as well as the level of influence staff may have in decision-making could help. Additionally, considering organization-wide family friendly policies could be another solution. This could look like maternity leave, child care, leave to get out of an unhealthy situation, affordable insurance, paid time off, among other standards that contribute to one’s quality of life. Again, lack of resources is often named as the biggest barrier to policies as such. How can the coalition get innovative with strategies to address this? Perhaps this looks like petitioning funders and/or leveraging grants by committing to comprehensive services across agencies. In addition, offering ongoing professional development opportunities about how to change systems would help institutions access the tools needed for shifting their internal environments, and hold themselves accountable for doing so, as well as more effectively shifting the external community environment.

Connecting back to the Disparities section, professional development also provides an opportunity for employees to reflect on how their roles within an organization contribute to combating inequities in the outcomes they are working against. This could look like cultural competency and humility trainings, equitable data practice trainings, and other educational opportunities to increase knowledge about inequities in their specific fields. These trainings could be both an internal agency strategy and also implemented in a wider community setting; ensuring each organization is sharing knowledge and resources, using the same language, and establishing a similar lens through which we view collective impact. In addition, having community conversations to build awareness and challenge these norms, as well as understand how to decolonize systems, is pivotal in creating change, and these can start internally within an organization as well as community-wide. It is essential that organizations acknowledge the urgent necessity of changing our approach to have

collective impact; if we want to see different outcomes, we need to change our approach and find different, more innovative solutions.

Ultimately, we are all trying to address the effects of the *same* risk and protective factors. Therefore, we all have a role in upstream prevention—that is, addressing risk factors *before* they manifest into negative health outcomes. And, we are all working among the same community norms underlying our approaches. By avoiding duplication of efforts and combining diverse perspectives, collective effort is the foundation for a wraparound approach in our community; one that acknowledges how multifaceted issues require multifaceted solutions.



Needs Statement

Goal 4b. Community Environments - *Establish a more collective approach to addressing the inequities (e.g. homelessness, gender wage gap, racial disparities, colonialism, impact of trauma, etc.) in our community by aligning resources and coordinating efforts around trainings, community dialogues, planning sessions, and policy development.*

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Pathways Community Needs Assessment (CNA) has revealed several critical areas where support is needed, specifically in regards to the Pathways Coalition's five focus areas - schools, youth leadership, male engagement, family engagement, and community environments. The Community Environments goal, previously combined with family engagement/home environments within goal four of the former prevention plan, was pulled out as its own goal after thorough examination of the community through this CNA process. The CNA revealed that strategic and intentional efforts are needed to explicitly address the larger systems and structures contributing to violence in our community. Additionally, this CNA led to [updates](#) for each of the remaining four goals as well as their respective outcomes and indicators.

By uncovering and validating needs in the Sitka community, this process allowed for relevant recommendations, leading to a guide for moving the coalition's work

SITKA COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

COMMUNITY PROFILE

Sitka, traditionally known as Sheef'ká, is a rural, remote Southeast Alaskan coastal community and the ancestral home of the Lingít people. Located on Shee (also known as Baranof Island), it is in the heart of the Tongass, the largest temperate rain forest in the world. Accessible only by boat or plane, food and outside resources are scarce and expensive. The city has a population of about 8,400 residents and relies on a variety of economic sectors like seafood processing, healthcare, and tourism.

THE PURPOSE

This Community Needs Assessment (CNA) was developed by the Pathways Coalition to compile current data regarding the health of the Sitka community and to determine potential strategies for moving the work forward in each of the coalition's focus areas:

- SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS
- YOUTH LEADERSHIP
- ENGAGING MEN AND BOYS
- FAMILY ENVIRONMENTS
- COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTS



forward. See [CNA Snapshot](#) for Key Findings and Recommendations. These findings underscore the importance of targeted initiatives to address identified gaps and build upon existing community strengths. They highlight the need for collaborative, equity-driven solutions that reflect the diverse perspectives and lived experiences of community members, especially those from underrepresented and underserved populations. This CNA has provided a comprehensive understanding of challenges and priorities within the Pathways five focus areas and identified potential strategies for moving forward. This map will serve as a guide for the collective work. See *below*.

Community Needs Assessment Roadmap

	SCHOOLS	YOUTH LEADERSHIP	FAMILIES	COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTS	MALE ENGAGEMENT
PROBLEMS	Proficiency Rates Absenteeism Lack of Coordinated Services	Bullying Mental Health Decline Teen Dating Violence Underinvolved Youth	Child Abuse Childcare Deserts Lack of Parent Resources	Disparities Economic Stress Crime Interpersonal Violence Mental Health Decline Alcohol/Substance Misuse	Rigid masculinity gender norms
NEEDS STATEMENTS	Lack of a coordinated approach between schools and community partners to fill in gaps and support the implementation of the district's strategic plan	Limited concrete systems for mental health supports and when disclosures happen — Lack of meaningful and respectful youth/adult partnerships — Lack of participation from youth	Limited opportunities that build parental knowledge and skills — Low parental resilience — Lack of equitable access to family engagement opportunities	Lack of coordinated approach to addressing the inequities in our community (e.g. homelessness, gender wage gap, racial disparities, colonialism, impact of trauma, etc.)	Limited buy-in around male engagement work — Limited community male allyship — Lack of collective approach to male engagement — Lack of awareness around masculinity norms and their effects
POTENTIAL STRATEGIES	Systems of response, coordinated approach (disclosures, mental health) — Streamline services to connect needs to resources — Revisit/ update strategic plan (SSD) with new admin and partners — TMHFA/YMHFA: training teens, teachers, parents — Shared curriculum or way to approach the peer climate issues (look at what is working elsewhere and implement with fidelity)	Establish tracking systems to identify and access under-involved students — Strengthen relationships between schools and outside organizations to better establish systems of support and avoid gaps in care — Address peer culture dynamics by streamlining messages and strategies — Pool resources — Provide trainings, resources, support to everyone to address decline in youth mental health	Coordinating a messaging campaign targeting parents — Streamlining parenting resources and collectively distributing them — Targeting parents through existing events — Working closely with the schools as a channel for accessing parents/families	Learning more about resource sharing and pooling funding (e.g. coalition assistance program) — Collaborating on professional development around inequities/ services (we train each other based on expertise) — Coordinated approach to disseminate resource on these topics (inequities, services in community) to community members (e.g. database, free library) — Creating environments in which staff feel valued and supported (the whole person) (e.g. family-friendly policies) How can we do this? What are orgs already doing?	Continue messaging about society's masculinity norms and their effects to build awareness — Foster buy-in amongst coalition partner organizations to engage men and boys collectively — Work with existing male allies to engage more men and be mentors to the younger generations — Look to Indigenous teachings and ways of being to inform and guide male engagement work



As a coalition, we are committed to using this data to inform actionable strategies and foster partnerships across sectors. Using [this roadmap](#) as a guide and reference, our next steps will include sharing the results of this assessment with the community, as well as developing action steps for moving the recommendations forward. This process has been a critical step in ensuring that our coalition's work is meeting the needs of Sitka to create a healthier, more resilient, and equitable community.

We thank all participants and stakeholders for their invaluable contributions to both the Pathways Coalition and for putting this CNA together. We look forward to a continued partnership and to furthering the work together.

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We would like to express our sincere gratitude to all those who contributed to the success of the Pathways Coalition and who continue to carry out the collective work. These efforts would not be possible without the dedication and collaboration of coalition partners, funders, local businesses, community members, youth leaders, families, male allies, as well as Sitkans Against Family Violence (SAFV) leadership and backbone support.

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Center for Community/Early Learning Program: *Program Coordinator, Developmental and Infant Mental Health Specialist*

Sitkans Against Family Violence: *Afterschool Prevention Specialist, Communications/Evaluation Specialist, Community Coordinator, Evaluation Assistant, Executive Director, Prevention Director, Youth Program Manager*

Sitka Counseling: *Prevention Director, Prevention Program Manager, Prevention Specialist*

Sitka School District: *Assistant Superintendent, Cultural Director, Family Engagement Coordinator, Superintendent*

Sitka Tribe of Alaska: *Academic Services Manager, CREED Deputy Director, Cultural and Academic Resources Director*

Youth Advocates of Sitka, Inc.: *Community Mental Health Program Coordinator*

Additionally, we acknowledge that our work takes place on the traditional and ancestral land of the Lingít people. We honor their enduring relationship and stewardship of this land past, present, and future.

GUNALCHÉESH!

Backbone Agency
Sitkans Against Family Violence
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