

**United  
Way**



United Way  
of Southeastern Idaho



# AMERICAN FALLS EARLY LEARNING COLLABORATIVE

EARLY LEARNING NEEDS ASSESSMENT / PRESCHOOL DEVELOPMENT GRANT / SEPTEMBER 2020

# AMERICAN FALLS NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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## II. Introduction



Research indicates that children 0-5 years of age undergo a tremendous amount of brain development preparing them for the process of formalized learning. This means that the environments which children are in *prior* to entering kindergarten are extremely important. To develop brain connections, language development, memory, problem solving skills, etc., young children must be given every opportunity to access quality early learning programs. In Idaho there are no state funded early learning facilities, requiring families to rely on privately owned businesses which tend to be

limited in number and high in cost, limiting access to large swaths of the population. Residents living in rural areas, low-income families, and households where English is not the primary language, face additional barriers to accessing quality early learning programs. To minimize these barriers, Idaho Association for the Education of Young Children (IDAEYC) offered communities state-wide an opportunity to build regional collaboratives addressing their local early learning issues through a grant opportunities known as Preschool the Idaho Way (PTIW) and the Preschool Development Grant (PDG).

Promotion and support of high-quality learning environments is a key focal area for UWSEI through its Cradle to Career work. As part of the American Falls Collaborative, UWSEI has been a partner and facilitator throughout the planning process. In the implementation phase, their contribution has been to ensure that no family interested in enrolling their child in preschool will be denied or deterred due to the barrier of cost. UWSEI has committed to providing both partial to full scholarships to any family that needs it. ***This collaborative believes that family income should not be the determining factor for the trajectory of a child's education nor their subsequent health and financial stability outcomes.***

As the American Falls Collaborative wraps up the pilot year, the next steps will include a transition to a continuous improvement model where learnings from the first year will be used to guide future work. The findings from this Needs Assessment will serve as the springboard for developing a comprehensive strategic plan aimed at continuing to create positive change in the early learning environment in American Falls.

## III. Vision Statement:

Every child in American Falls will have the opportunity and access to high quality early learning programs that meet their family's needs.

## IV. Mission Statement:

The mission of the American Falls Early Learning Collaborative is to engage a diverse group of committed community members to develop a quality preschool program accessible to all, eliminating barriers to attendance, and to use its early successes to build a foundation for future work.

## AREA DEMOGRAPHICS AND INCOME CHARACTERISTICS

Total Population: **6,141**

Total Households: **2,052**

Total Population Under 5 years Old: **528**

Estimated Number of 4 year old children: **106**

Percent of Households Speaking Language other than English: **36.9%**

Median Household Income: **\$52,530**

Percent Non-White or Two Races: **25.6%**

Percent Hispanic/Latinx: **40.5%**

Percent of Families Below 200% Federal Poverty Level: **43.7%**

Percent of Families with 2 or More Workers: **55.4%**

Percent of Households Receiving Food Stamps: **14.4%**

Households Below the ALICE Threshold (United Way Report: Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed): **47.0%**

Percent of students in American Falls SD #381 Qualifying for Free/Reduced Lunch: **68.5%**

*Source: US Census 2018 American Community Survey*

*Note: For purposes of this assessment the Zip Code 83211 was used which is nearly identical with the American Falls School District Boundary.*

## V. Collaborative Key Questions

The collaborative's work has been on a tight timeline from the very beginning. Initial discussions included conversation around the importance of finding the balance of gathering comprehensive and quality data for analysis and context to be used to make good decisions; but also knowing that perfect data does not exist. The lack of perfect or complete data cannot be a reason to not act or make decisions. Based on this conversation, the group determined the following key questions areas were most important to guide their work as a planning team.

### Key Question Area #1: Existing conditions in American Falls early learning environments

1. **Types of care providers: private, public, daycare vs preschool, ICCP status, large vs small group, etc.**
2. **Capacity, enrollment, services provided by facility, program costs, amenities, facility specialties (bilingual, developmental delays), etc.**

**3. Defining what quality early learning in American Falls looks like, which providers meet quality standards, and involvement with IdahoSTARS Steps to Quality**

Quantitative & Qualitative Evidence



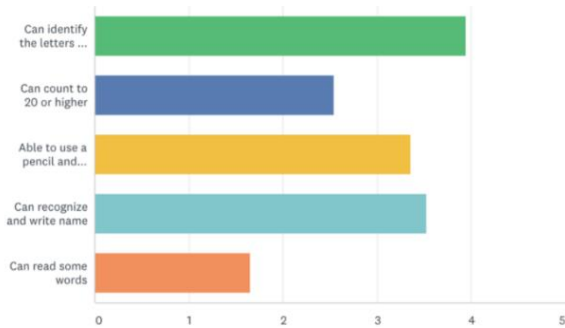
During their second meeting the American Falls Collaborative discussed the importance of not just providing additional preschool seats, but that they would need to be quality seats. In those initial discussions quality was defined by the group as: building academic skills (counting, reading, identifying letters, etc.), developing social/emotional skills, having a validated curriculum, use of assessment tools to monitor children’s progress within the curriculum, on-going provider professional development, and participation in the IdahoSTARS Steps to Quality Program (obtaining at least a rating

of 2 or higher). (June 10, 2019 AF Collaborative Meeting Notes)

The following charts illustrates general public/parent perceptions of necessary components of an early learning program which could also be deciphered as components of a quality early learning program. (Fall 2019 Early Learning Survey)

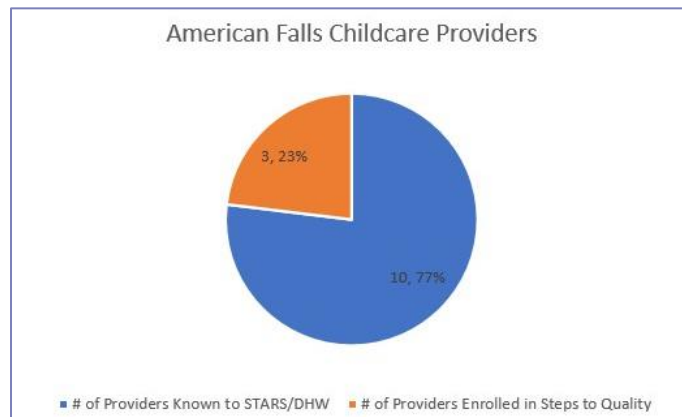
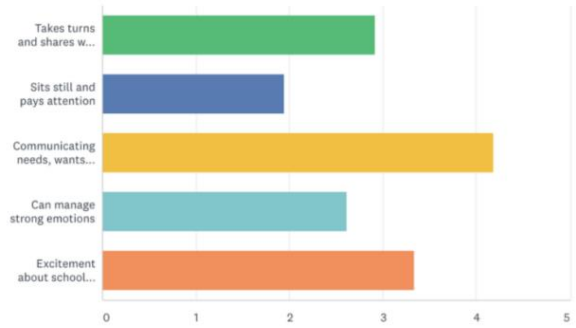
Rank the items below in order of importance for your child to be ready for kindergarten? (1 is the most important)

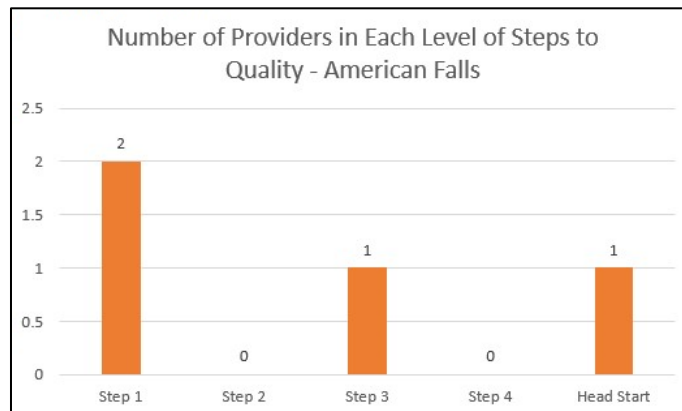
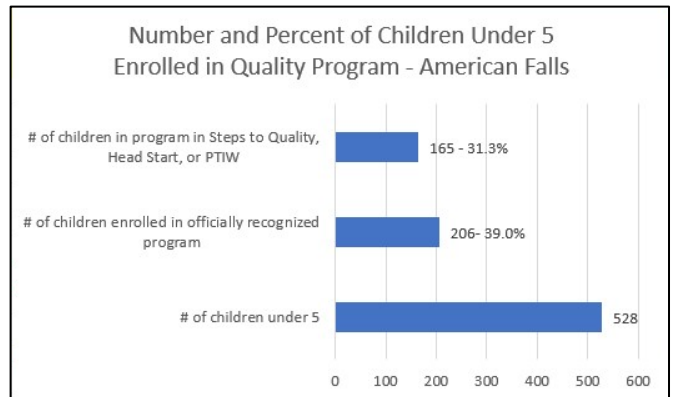
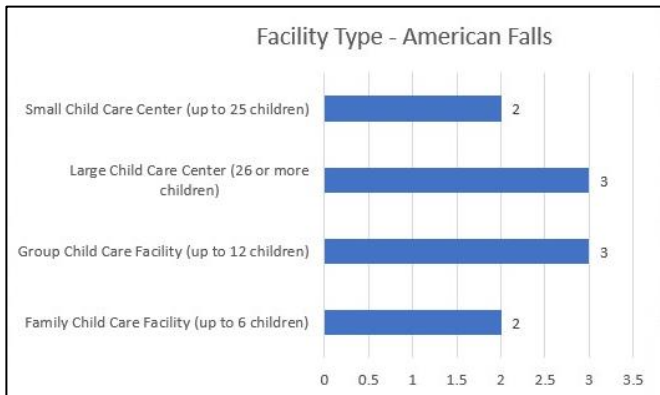
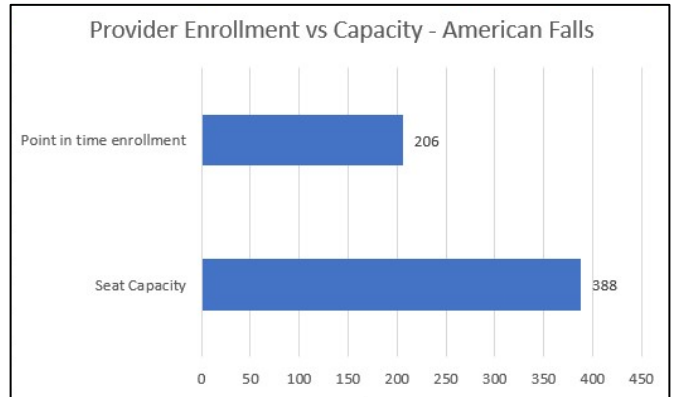
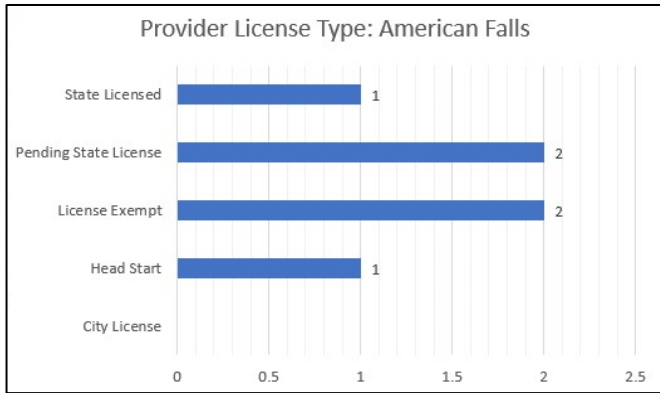
Answered: 201 Skipped: 231



Rank the items below in order of importance for your child to be ready for kindergarten? (1 is the most important)

Answered: 201 Skipped: 231





**Key Question Area #2: Understanding American Falls community perception of the value of early learning and their vision for the future of early learning in their community.**

1. Does the American Falls community value early learning as important to children’s success later in life?
2. If all children participated in quality early learning programs, how might the American Falls community look different in the future?
3. Where do families go for trusted information about the education and development of their children?

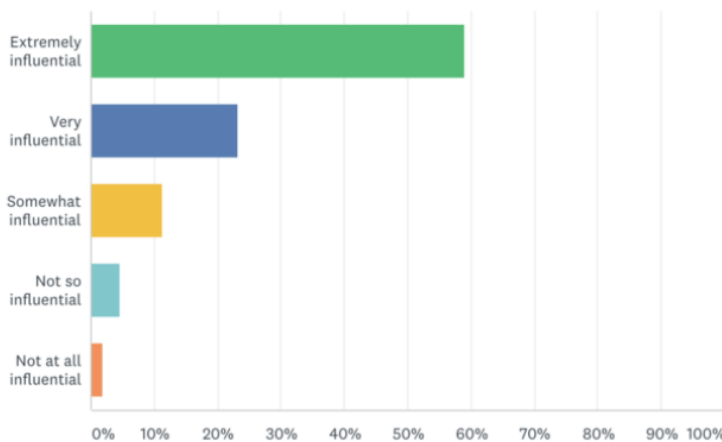
Quantitative & Qualitative Evidence

Early childhood education and childcare services are essential for building strong foundations for children to have a healthy and successful life. This includes developing necessary reading, writing, and math skills as a precursor for future learning. Additionally, the group emphasized the need to develop children’s social/emotional skills as equally important to academic skills. For children to be successful in school they must be able to follow simple directions, manage emotions appropriately, follow-through on assigned tasks, etc. The consensus was that while these skills begin development in childhood, they become the essential building blocks for the soft skills in high demand in today’s workforce. (6-24-19 AF Collaborative Meeting Notes)

The AF Collaborative findings are consistent with the general public/parent perceptions of the value and influence of early learning programs on successes later in life, as seen in the following chart. (Fall 2019 Early Learning Survey)

How influential is early learning (before kindergarten) on a person's opportunities later in life?

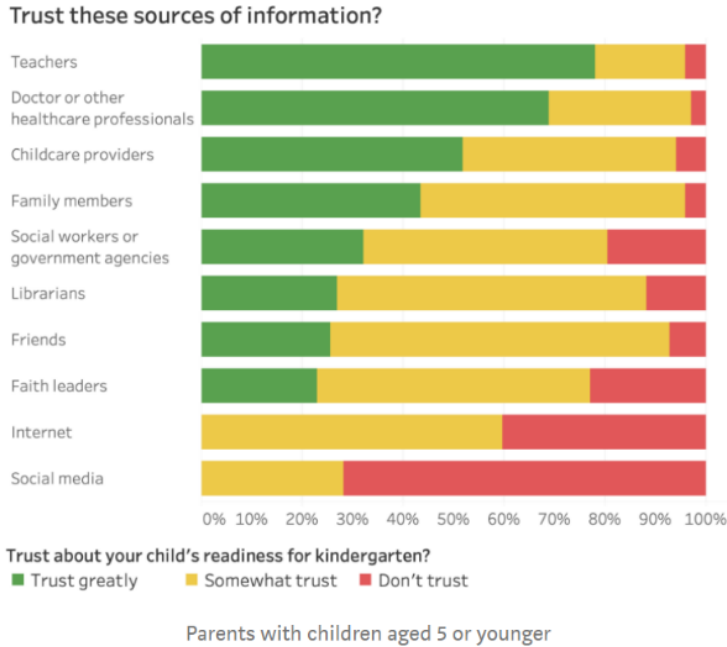
Answered: 432 Skipped: 0



The American Falls Collaborative was asked to envision the future of the community should they achieve their goal and every child had access to high quality early learning environments. Responses included: higher scores for state standardized tests from Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, increased rates of post-secondary degree obtainment, less crime in the community, a more educated and qualified workforce, and citizens with improved social skills. (6-10-19 AF Collaborative Meeting Notes)

“Families seem to be eager to participate in our preschool programs and are especially excited about scholarships. I have had a few parents talk about how excited they are to have this initiative as part of our community and they believe it will do so much good here in American Falls. On the other hand, some are still a little confused about what our initiative is and are confused about applying with our application vs just at preschool and also that we are working as a team (all preschools together). I have had a few people ask if they can sign up their younger children yet, so there are a few people looking ahead. I feel like some of the confusion could have been remedied easier with a preschool roundup event, and maybe something we need to investigate for the future.” (Grant Coordinator Parent Feedback, Spring 2020-Fall 2020)

Parents and families are inundated with information about how to best set their children up for success. The collaborative felt it was important to determine the most trusted sources of information as a starting place for reaching out to families about the work of the group. This chart shows where various people/groups fall along the spectrum of trustworthiness. (Early Learning Survey Fall 2019)



### Key Question Area #3: Clarification of prohibitive barriers for families in American Falls, which keep children out of quality early learning environments.

1. Why do so few students participate in quality preschool programs? (48 children out of an incoming kindergarten class of about 115, or 42% in Fall 2018)
2. Are there any populations with specific needs which create barriers to children attending quality early learning programs?

#### Quantitative & Qualitative Evidence

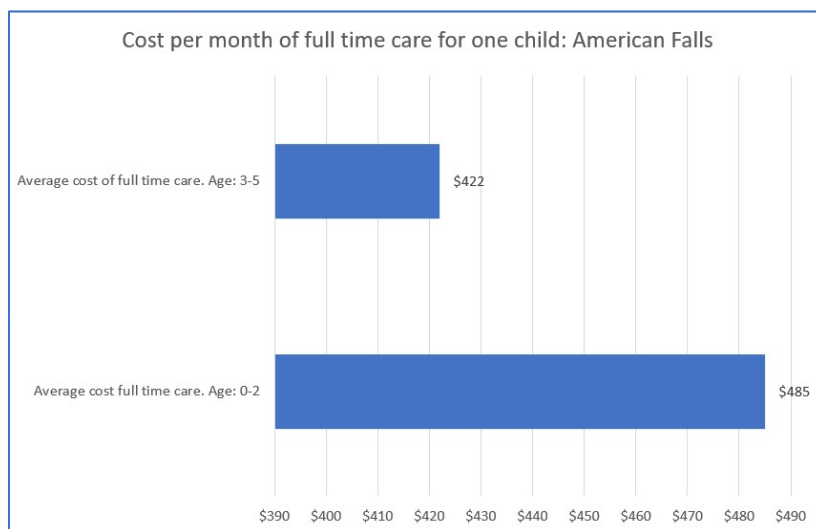
As the collaborative dissected barriers to its vision that all children in American Falls will have the opportunity and access to attend a quality preschool, it was clear that financial instability was a determining factor. According to the most recent ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) Report, 47% of households in American Falls are struggling to pay for basic necessities on a monthly basis. According to the report, a household with two parents and two children in daycare/preschool needs an annual income of \$60,444 to make ends meet. Census data for the median household income in American Falls is \$52,530. This makes it clear that for a significant portion of the community, it is not possible for them to afford to send their children to daycare and/or preschool. Additionally, with 40.5% of American Falls residents identifying as Hispanic, where the primary language spoken in the home is Spanish, language becomes an additional barrier for families to overcome. (ALICE Report, Summer 2020 and American Community Survey, US Census)

The household budget tools and cost of care data below underscore this point:



ALICE Household Survival Budget, Power County, Idaho, 2018				
	Single Adult	Two Adults	Two Adults Two School-Age Children	Two Adults, Two in Child Care
Housing	\$558	\$571	\$759	\$759
Child Care	\$0	\$0	\$321	\$899
Food	\$261	\$542	\$906	\$791
Transportation	\$325	\$497	\$794	\$794
Health Care	\$171	\$424	\$727	\$727
Technology	\$55	\$75	\$75	\$75
Miscellaneous	\$161	\$245	\$396	\$458
Taxes	\$239	\$342	\$380	\$534
Monthly Total	\$1,770	\$2,696	\$4,358	\$5,037
Annual Total	\$21,240	\$32,352	\$52,296	\$60,444
Hourly Wage	\$10.62	\$16.18	\$26.15	\$30.22

### Cost of Full Time Care per Month (IdahoSTARS Data)



### VI. Summary of Findings

As a result of our community needs assessment we determined the following areas will provide the greatest opportunity to create an immediate positive impact in the American Falls community. These findings will be used in the next phase of the grant process including the creation of SMART goals, developing associated strategies and crafting a detailed strategic action plan to be used as a working document by the collaborative for the next three years. The following areas will be more fully developed in the American Falls Collaborative Strategic Action Plan, available November 1, 2020.

1. The demand and interest in additional quality preschool spaces indicates that the collaborative should continue to focus on creating additional seats.
2. A significant portion of the American Falls community struggles financially. In order to provide a quality experience for all children the collaborative will need to develop a plan to provide

sustained funding for: scholarships, facility capacity, additional teacher/provider capacity, curriculum/assessment materials, on-going professional development training, etc.

3. Increasing spaces for more students to participate is only the first part of the work to be done in American Falls. It is clear that community members expect and deserve quality programs for their children. This makes it a priority for the collaborative to keep quality at top of mind when strategizing their action plan.

### **Parent Quotes from September 2020:**

- *I think it's an awesome thing for lower income families or single parent families. It's informative and lessens the financial burdens.*
- *We are LOVING the quality education that our daughter is receiving and appreciate the initiative! We are big fans!!*
- *Smooth, professional, informative and over all a great experience!*
- *It has been awesome!! Love all the information. My only complaint is wish it would have happened sooner!!*
- *Great! Honi at St. John's preschool has been so helpful! I wasn't able to transport my child to preschool because of work and she put me in contact with families from our same daycare so we could carpool. So helpful when she didn't have to!! My little guy is also LOVING preschool!*
- *So far it has been great. I like having my sons school start at 8:30 am. I feel like it helps not only him get into the routine of waking up early and starting his day, but the rest of the family too (me, dad).*
- *I want to say thank you, especially for providing opportunities for a scholarship. That not only helps out our family for affordability but many other families to be able to have their children attend preschool because preschool can be pretty costly on top of daycare etc.*
- *It has been delightful to have a large group of people looking out for my preschooler and if she's registered and where! Lots of options and information. I feel reassured that my child will receive a quality education at most AF preschools (those participating) Thank you!*

## **VII. Data Sources**

### **ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) Report (June 2020)**

The ALICE Report is a new way of measuring the households in communities that live above the Federal Poverty Level, but do not earn enough to meet their basic needs. These individuals and families live everyday with the uncertainty of if they will make ends meet on a month to month basis causing them to make difficult decisions about what necessities to pay for and which to forgo. ALICE households live on the brink of financial despair and do not have the means to pay for “extras” or even unexpected emergencies that crop up in life. The newest report can be found: <https://www.unitedforalice.org/>

### **American Falls Collaborative Narratives (Summer 2019-current)**

The American Falls preschool collaborative was initially assembled to execute a Preschool the Idaho Way planning grant, wherein the group would design and implement a high-quality preschool experience for their community. The group then transitioned into an implementation team and now a broader Early Learning Team working through the Preschool Development Grant. The collaborative is made up of

local: day care/preschool providers, school district staff, business owners, health care center, quality childcare referral agency, mayor, parents, Idaho Public Television, and United Way of Southeastern Idaho.

Compiled responses include personal feedback from collaborative members and anecdotal evidence from parents, employees, and community members whom collaborative members interact with on a regular basis within their area of expertise. The collaborative met seven times from May 21, 2019 through August 19, 2019 to work through planning materials, address questions about the grant, review relevant local data, dissect community conditions, and to provide feedback necessary for finalizing the implementation grant request. Various groupings of the collaborative have met for an additional 15 meetings between August 2019 and September 2020 as part of the implementation efforts, as well as to begin planning for the Preschool Development Grant.

#### **Department of Health & Welfare Public Records Request (September 2020)**

Data about local daycare/preschool providers was requested from the Department of Health and Welfare. Information requested included contact information, facility type, facility amenities, capacity, enrollment, ICCP status, complaints and inspection history, participation with IdahoSTARS, etc. This data is protected by Idaho's Public Records Law and may not be published or redistributed. For the purpose of this needs assessment the data was synthesized and compiled into charts. Any questions about contents of the raw data can be made to United Way of Southeastern Idaho.

#### **Early Learning Survey Data (Fall 2019)**

In September of 2019 a survey was developed and deployed by Make Idaho Better on behalf of United Way of Southeastern Idaho and IMPACT East Idaho's Early Learning Collaborative. The purpose of the survey was to quantify the public's understanding of early learning environments, gauge the value placed on early learning opportunities, to understand barriers and opportunities for expanding access to resources for families. 432 total responses were submitted from Idaho residents (Southeastern Idaho Counties count breakdown is: 107 Bannock, 2 Bear Lake, 5 Bingham, 2 Caribou, 1 Franklin, 0 Oneida, and 31 Power). When data was disaggregated by region in the state, Southeastern Idaho responses fell within the majority responses, as such, in this needs assessment the generalized responses are deemed representative of the individual counties being assessed. Link to survey findings can be found here: <https://medium.com/make-idaho-better/early-learning-pre-k-survey-a8525825b9ea>

#### **Grant Coordinator Parent Feedback (Spring 2020-Fall 2020)**

Tennille Call was appointed as the Preschool the Idaho Way Grant Coordinator in early spring of 2020. She serves as primary contact for the collaborative as a whole as well as for families and the general American Falls Community. In her role she created application and communication materials, managed the website and social media content, and facilitated meetings that related to the grant. In this role she communicated regularly with parents addressing questions, concerns, and taking general feedback about the process and program. Parent narratives are compiled from Tennille's personal notes and recollection of these experiences.

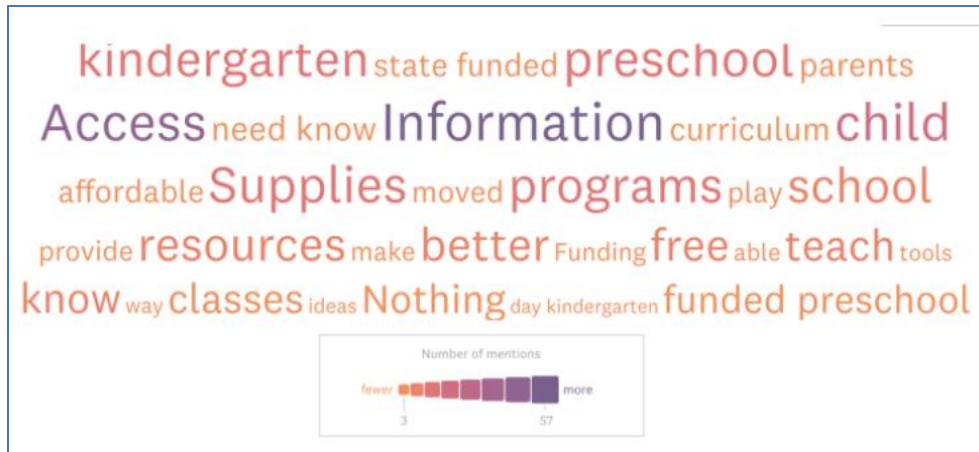
#### **IdahoSTARS Report (September 2020)**

Upon review of the Department of Health and Welfare's Public Request it was noted that numerous categories initially requested were missing or not available. Subsequent contact was made with the Region 6 office for IdahoSTARS. They provided supplemental information about daycare/preschool

facilities including capacity and enrollment information, contacts, participation with Steps of Quality Program, average cost of programs, amenities offered by facility, etc. Raw data available upon request.

**United States Census Bureau Data**

Data about community demographics was taken from the United States Census Bureau website at: <https://www.census.gov/>



In the Fall 2019 Early Learning Survey the final question was an open form field asking parents what they most need or want, to help get their child ready for kindergarten. This word cloud shows which items were named most often.

**VIII. Appendix Data Found on Following Pages**





## APPENDIX A:

### American Falls Early Learning Collaborative Quantitative Data for Needs Assessment

#### AREA DEMOGRAPHICS AND INCOME CHARACTERISTICS

Total Population: **6,141**

Total Households: **2,052**

Total Population Under 5 years Old: **528**

Estimated Number of 4 year old children: **106**

Percent of Households Speaking Language other than English: **36.9%**

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Percent of Families Below 200% Federal Poverty Level: **43.7%**

Percent of Families with 2 or More Workers: **55.4%**

Percent of Households Receiving Food Stamps: **14.4%**

Households Below the ALICE Threshold (United Way Report: Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed): **47.0%**

Percent of students in American Falls SD #381 Qualifying for Free/Reduced Lunch: **68.5%**

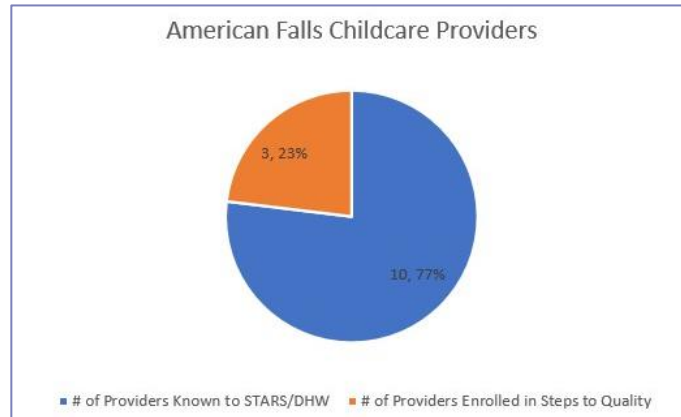
*Source: US Census 2018 American Community Survey*

*Note: For purposes of this assessment the Zip Code 83211 was used which is nearly identical with the American Falls School District Boundary.*

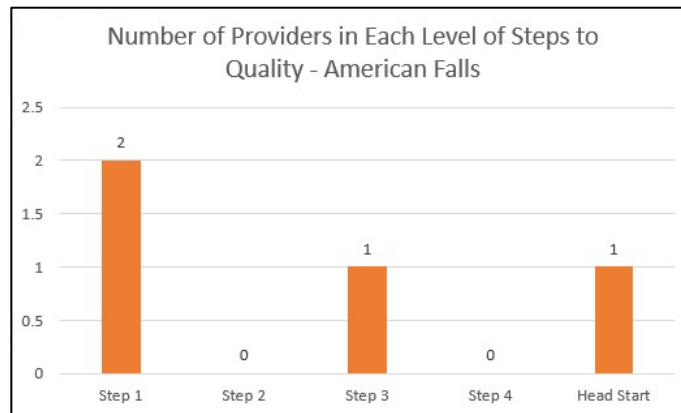
### Child Care Provider Characteristics

Number of Providers Known to Idaho DHW/IdahoSTARS: **10**

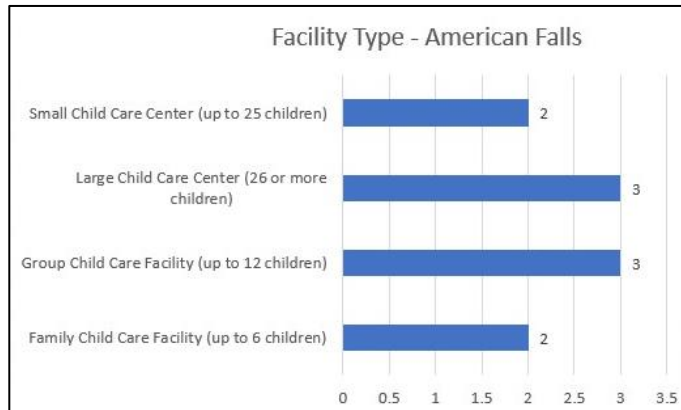
Number of Providers Enrolled in Steps to Quality: **3**



Steps to Quality Progress:



Facility Type:

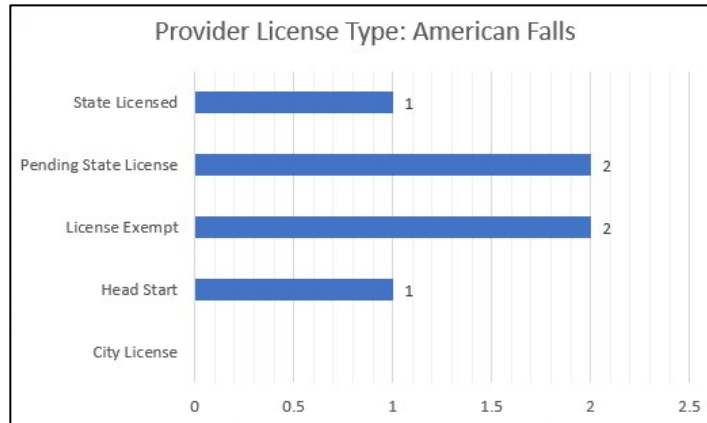


Source: Idaho Department of Health and Welfare and Idaho STARS Region 6 Office

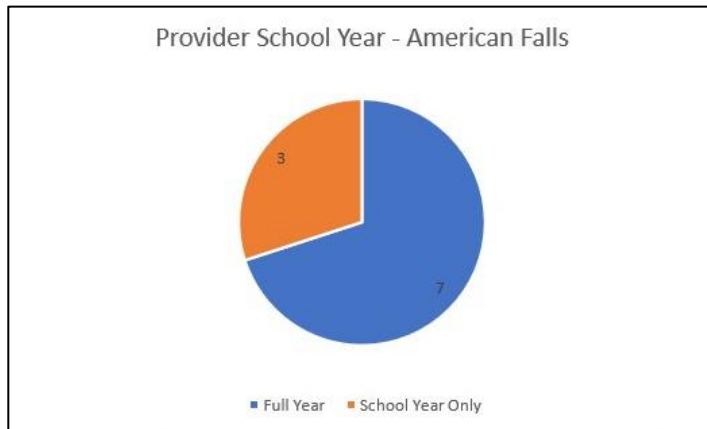
Note: For purposes of this assessment the Zip Code 83211 was used which is nearly identical with the American Falls School District Boundary.

### Child Care Provider Characteristics, Continued:

#### Provider License Type:



#### Provider Services Provided During:

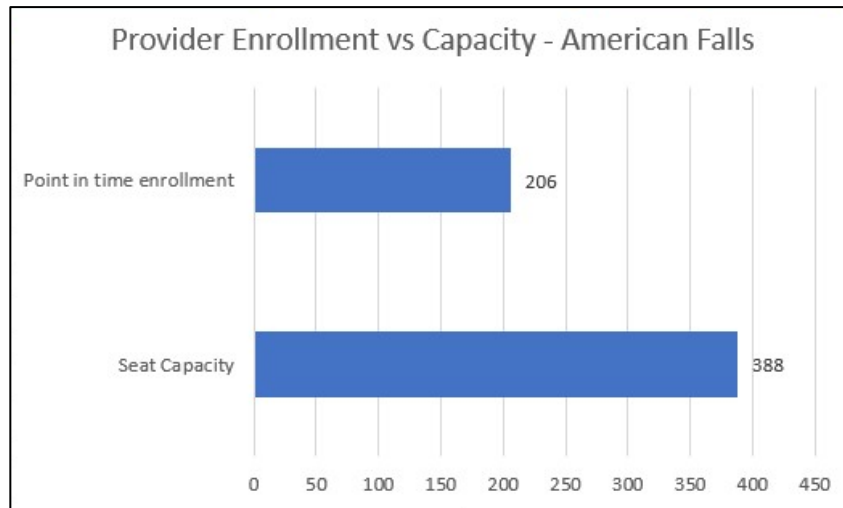


Source: Idaho Department of Health and Welfare and Idaho STARS Region 6 Office

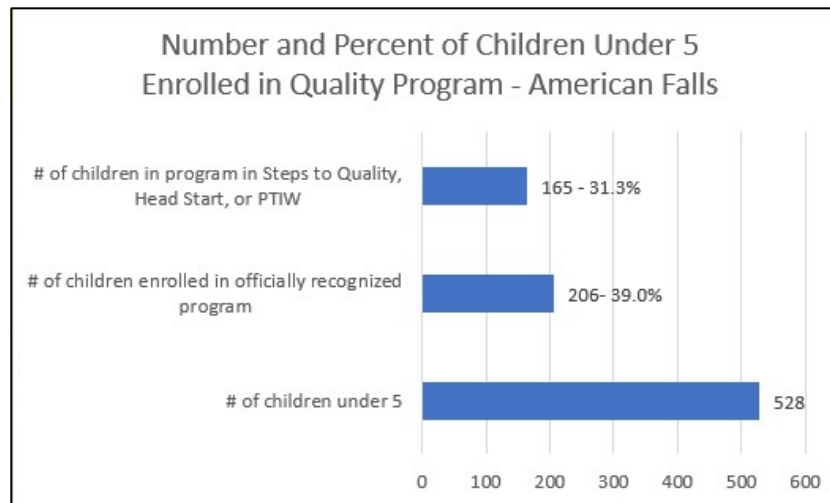
For purposes of this assessment the Zip Code 83211 was used which is nearly identical with the American Falls School District Boundary.

### Child Care Provider Inventory and Enrollment

Provider Capacity vs. Enrollment:



Percent of Children 0-4 enrolled in Quality Program:



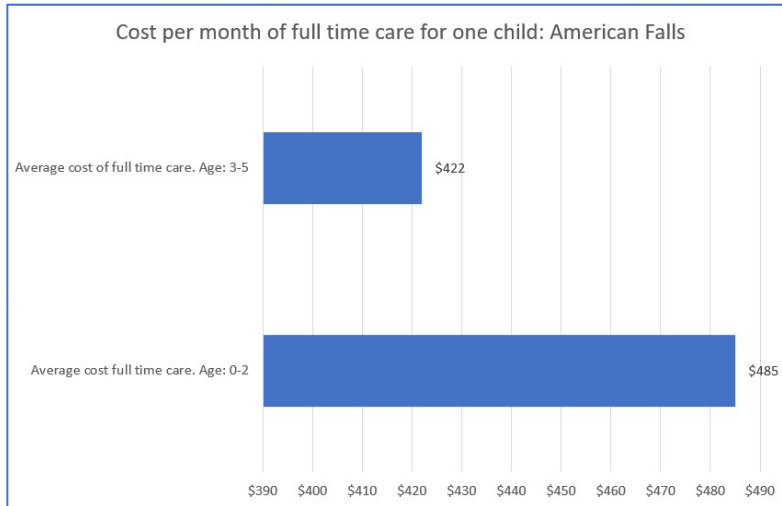
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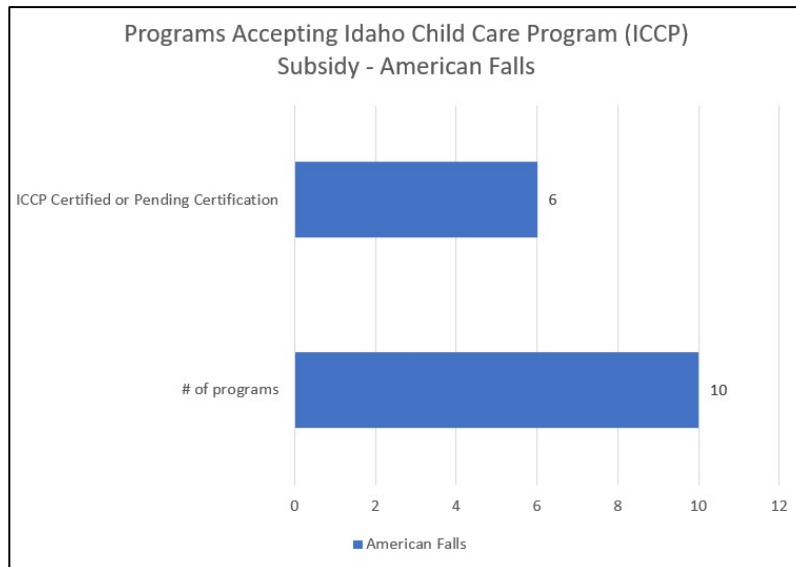
### Provider Cost

#### Cost of Full Time Care per Month (IdahoSTARS Data)



Average Cost of Full Time Care for Power County per Month (United Way Idaho ALICE Report): **\$449.50**

#### Idaho Child Care Program (ICCP) Subsidy:



Source: Idaho Department of Health and Welfare and Idaho STARS Region 6 Office and United Ways of Idaho ALICE Report.

Note: For purposes of this assessment the Zip Code 83211 was used which is nearly identical with the American Falls School District Boundary.



## Transportation

Childcare programs providing some form of transportation: **50%**

*Source: Idaho Department of Health and Welfare and Idaho STARS Region 6 Office and US Census American Community Survey 2018*

*Note: For purposes of this assessment the Zip Code 83211 was used which is nearly identical with the American Falls School District Boundary.*

## COVID-19 Impacts on Childcare

United Way of SE Idaho COVID-19 Impacts on Families Survey (359 respondents):

- In SE Idaho, 45.2% of households using child care and making less than \$50,000 annually reported having their work hours negatively impacted, reduced, or eliminated during the pandemic due to childcare issues compared to only 32.9% of all SE Idaho respondents.

*Source: United Way of SE Idaho Impacts of COVID-19 on Families Survey <https://www.unitedwaysei.org/covid-19>*