

From: [Whitelos](#)
To: [Senate Finance Committee](#)
Subject: Senate Finance Committee Budget- PREK
Date: Wednesday, April 01, 2015 9:44:03 PM

Dear Senate Finance Committee,

“ A Low Risk, High Return Investment”

I am writing asking that the funding for the PreK program be reinstated. If you feel it cannot be 100% reinstated please consider reinstating 75% or a portion of it.

Enclosed also below is a letter to the editor in this week's Nome Nugget by Eric Wohlforth.

The following is the cost analysis and data results from the PreK program.

- 1) Cost effective- This program because it is done in collaboration with Kawerak Head Start and the Private Nome Preschool costs much less than if any of these entities tried to provide these same services alone. Prek costs the State of Alaska about \$6000 per year per student which is much less then the \$17,000 average for students K-12. State funds are matched by Kawerak Head Start's federal and local funding and Nome Preschool uses local private monies.
- 2) PreK test data- The data shows that this program works. Entrance tests to kindergarten show that students who attend Head Start and Nome Preschool with the Prek collaborative program are mostly, about 70 to 90%, ready for kindergarten. Their same age peers who do not attend either program are mostly NOT ready for kindergarten with the same numbers , about 70 to 90%.
- 3) Drop out prevention strategy- Longitudinal data shows that attendance in high quality Early Childhood education lessens the chance of needing school remediation services, dropping out of high school, being incarcerated and receiving other public services. Also, students enrolled in high quality preschool education are more likely to be successful as determined by job and educational achievements, low divorce rate and lack of public financial support.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,
Janet Balice
Nome Alaska

P.S.- Please also see below Eric Wohlforth's letter to the editor which states the case very well.

A low risk, high return investment

By Eric Wohlforth

We in Alaska accept that the state will invest millions and billions of dollars to develop resources for pay-off down the road. Consider the long-awaited gas pipeline, consider state incentives for oil exploration and new production.

A far more certain investment for future return is investment in early childhood education. Yet the House Finance Subcommittee on Education & Early Development

has zeroed out about \$3.2 million in funding for Best Beginnings, Parents as Teachers, and the Alaska Pre-K Program. Everyone understands all too well the budget crunch we're in as a state. All of our spending should be scrutinized. It is early days to a final legislative decision. But the early education issue is too important to delay an objection. We must not sacrifice something with such obvious returns.

Study after study, confirmed by on-the-ground evidence in our own state, offer overwhelming evidence that early childhood efforts do work. Parents as Teachers, Best Beginnings, and high quality pre-K (a far cry from baby-sitting) prepare young children to succeed in school. Success in school leads to success in life.

We are way behind where we need to be in education at all levels. A major reason is our failure to develop the foundations for learning in our children:

- Fewer than half the children entering kindergarten in Alaska are prepared in all the ways experts say is important for success in school. It is no wonder our teachers struggle to get kids on track. Test scores languish when kids enter school so far behind.
- Alaska ranks 44th in the country for 4th grade reading levels and 51st in postsecondary attainment. How children fare on 4th grade reading tests is directly related to how ready they were to start school.
- Just 37.4% of our young adults in 2013 were enrolled in postsecondary education or had a degree.
- Alaska businesses frequently complain about the lack of local talent for jobs. That means Alaskans are missing opportunities for high paying jobs in leading sectors. An overwhelming body of science and research tells us that investments in early childhood – such as in-home visits; exposure to plenty of high quality, age-appropriate books; lots of quality parent engagement; and high quality pre-K – reap concrete returns from cost savings and greater economic productivity.

Investments in early childhood save money in the schools by reducing the need for remediation, special education, and holding children back. Investments in early childhood save costs in the criminal justice system and welfare.

Investments in early childhood yield revenue in the form of greater productivity. With an educated and skilled workforce, Alaska will attract new business.

States in far worse financial shape than Alaska understand this. Across the country – from small-government Oklahoma to recession-devastated Michigan – states have found that investment in statewide voluntary pre-Kindergarten programs produce results in educational success, job development, and crime reduction.

Investments in early childhood should be measured against other investment opportunities. We make these decisions on four core criteria: need, amount of money involved, prospects for return on the investment, and risk. Spending on early childhood makes more sense than most. The need is huge, the amount is relatively small, the prospects for return are very high, and the risk of doing it is non-existent. Early childhood is one of the lowest-risk, highest-yield investments we can make. The legislature should restore the \$3.2 million funding for Best Beginnings, Parents as Teachers, and Alaska Pre-K back into the budget.

Eric Wohlforth was Commissioner of Revenue under Governor William A. Egan, 1970-1972, and Chair of the Alaska Permanent Fund Corporation, 1997 to 1999 and 2002 to 2003. He is an attorney in Anchorage.