

Alaska State Legislature  
House Finance Budget Subcommittee Chair: Rep.  
Dan Ortiz

RE: Proposed budget amendments to the FY18 Alaska Department of Education and Early Development budget

February 20, 2017

To House Finance Budget Subcommittee Chair and Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in regards to the proposed budget amendments being considered by the House Finance Budget Subcommittee. My specific concerns are related to the proposed cuts or eliminations to the Pre-K Grants under the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, Teaching and Learning Division.

Providing excellent pre-elementary programs for Alaska's youngest learners needs to be a priority, especially during these turbulent fiscal times. I have personally witnessed the overwhelming benefits and long lasting effects of preschool education in my own children, as well as the students in Chugach School District. Development of skills in the areas of pre-academics, social skills, and love for learning are critical for success, especially prior to entering Kindergarten.

As a current recipient of a Year 1 Pre-Elementary Development Grant for the 2016- 17 school year, Chugach School District has just begun the process of incorporating necessary state support for our preschool program options. These preschool programs provide dynamic, relevant pre-elementary education that are based upon national and state standards, parent and community input, key professional development for pre-elementary staff, and braided streams of funding to build a powerful program to support our youngest students, including those with special needs. Parents, teachers, community members and administrators are in the process of completing the Strategic Plan for furthering the efforts of Chugach School District's Pre-Elementary Programs throughout all of our schools.

I respectfully request that you fully fund the Early Learning Pre-K grant budget in order to continue the support for our youngest students that receive limited support from the K-12 Base Student Allocation.

Sincerely,  
Debbie Treece  
Executive Director of Student Services Chugach  
School District

**From:** Gretchen Nelson [<mailto:glnelson19@gmail.com>]

**Sent:** Monday, February 20, 2017 11:27 AM

**To:** Rep. Daniel Ortiz <[Rep.Daniel.Ortiz@akleg.gov](mailto:Rep.Daniel.Ortiz@akleg.gov)>

**Subject:** AK Early Childhood budget testimony

Good morning Rep Ortiz and committee members,

I am writing this morning to strongly urge you to protect all budget funding which supports any preschool programming in the state of Alaska. I am a recently retired teacher/librarian with over 30 years of experience in the public education system of Anchorage Alaska. My degree is in elementary education with an early childhood emphasis and a library science endorsement. I am also the parent of two young adult daughters and had the privilege to work in a job share position and be home with them part time in their most formative years of preschool.

Extensive research has shown that the preschool years are what determine the path into adulthood. When the Anchorage School District set a goal to increase their high school graduation rates, one of their solutions was to put funds into preschool programs. The economics of cost to society alone are an argument for funding preschool programs versus funding all the social programs needed to support teens and adults who come through our system and don't succeed.

Please put the funding on the front end of supporting our community's future.

Thank you for your careful and serious consideration,

Gretchen L Nelson 3039 Alder Circle, Anchorage, AK

**From:** Steve Whitney [<mailto:sr.whitney@gmail.com>]  
**Sent:** Monday, February 20, 2017 11:41 AM  
**To:** Rep. Daniel Ortiz <[Rep.Daniel.Ortiz@akleg.gov](mailto:Rep.Daniel.Ortiz@akleg.gov)>  
**Subject:** Public comment of DEECD Budget Amendments

Steve Whitney  
PO Box 21554  
Juneau, AK 99802  
907-523-2127

Dear Members of the Education Sub-committee,

I am writing about the proposed amendment to the Department of Education and Early Childhood budget, and in particular, the proposed cuts to pre-school funding. I am a member of the Juneau School Board, and I have seen the potential that pre-school holds, and do not wish to see it cut.

We have tried many approaches to reducing the achievement gap between some of our minorities such as Alaska Natives and low income students. We have achieved some success, but we still have much more ahead of us. Of all of the options on the table, nothing is as promising in overcoming this gap as high quality pre-school.

We are at a time in history where it is increasingly crucial to have a solid education if you want to support your family. This is true if you pursue college or non-college pathways. It is also a time when our nation, more than ever, needs a highly skilled workforce. To not provide these skill is to deny our students, our towns, our state, and our nation to achieve their full potential.

I have heard some talk of using the Alaska Performance Scholarship (APS) funds to pay for pre-school. While I support funding pre-school, I am opposed to cannibalizing other programs to cover it. For us, the greatest benefit of the APS is that it gets students engaged and thinking about college. Whether they go to Alaskan schools or not, they review courses they need at the beginning of high school and think about what is required for college. I am a father of two teenage boys. I can talk myself blue in the face telling them what they need to do, and my message falls on deaf ears. But, when they see the APS information at the start of the high school course catalog, they get excited and start planning.

I am not as familiar with the other proposed cuts, but I suspect they will hurt other districts as any cuts would hurt us.

We have sustained years of cuts. The increase in costs, such as medical expenses, has outpaced the increases in funding for many years. We now have elementary classes at 30 students or more. We have high school teachers in core subjects such as math and English with more than 150 students. It is very difficult for teachers to spend adequate time grading assignments with that many kids. If an English teacher, with 150 kids spends 10 minutes grading an essay, and is able to spend two full hours each workday grading papers, that is over two full weeks per essay. Two hours is a lot when they have a full load of classes and have to make lesson plans. If they want to have the students make a draft before the final essay, that is over a month per essay. We have introduced efficiencies, such as online learning, but we have no substitute for skilled teachers reviewing the student's work.

We are asking for flat funding in all areas, including transportation, PERS/TRS, and the BSA. But despite that, we know our students are going to be shortchanged compared to those who came before them, and compared to what they need and our society needs for them to reach their potential.

-Steve Whitney

# Nome Preschool



Mackenzie Hall  
Nome Preschool  
Manager  
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Street  
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2/20/17

Dear Representative Dan Ortiz :

The proposed budget amendments to the FY18 Alaska Department of Education and Early Childhood removes funding for Pre-Kindergarten Grants going to school districts across the state. The grants are currently being used for a variety of services beyond simply curriculum and instruction. Considering the new education initiative being discussed by the Department, grant funding of this nature should be paused until the initiative can ensure their effectiveness.

The Nome Preschool Association is currently a recipient of such funding. This fiscal year we were unable to find a certified teacher due to late funding of this grant. Not having this certified teacher caused a shortage in staffing increasing our budget to provide our own staff.

The benefits of having a certified teacher are great education for the students in the community of Nome. Nome Preschool Association is the only pre-k for 3 year olds and one of two for 4 year olds in Nome. This budget cut will be affecting the future of 40 students in our school. The students who lack pre-k education often have educational delays rather than the students who benefit from the pre-k education programs with funding.

Sincerely,

Mackenzie Hall

Nome Preschool Association Inc.  
Board, Manager, Staff, Parents, Students

**From:** Jennifer Gordon [<mailto:jengordonconsulting@gmail.com>]  
**Sent:** Monday, February 20, 2017 12:02 PM  
**To:** Rep. Daniel Ortiz <[Rep.Daniel.Ortiz@akleg.gov](mailto:Rep.Daniel.Ortiz@akleg.gov)>; Rep. Harriet Drummond  
<[Rep.Harriet.Drummond@akleg.gov](mailto:Rep.Harriet.Drummond@akleg.gov)>  
**Subject:** Testimony for fy18 Education budget

Dear Representatives of the House Committee on Education,

I am submitting my public testimony and opposition to the proposed cuts to FY18 Education budget, particularly those aimed at eliminating the PreK Grant and Parents As Teachers funding.

My two children, ages 16 and 14, are highly successful, socially/emotionally capable, self confident individuals due to the excellent preschool and preK experiences they received here in Anchorage. As a new mother with my 3-year old child, I was in shock about how difficult and expensive it was to seek out a preK Education. Luckily I found an affordable option for my family. Every family does not have that luxury, and every family deserves access to this very important educational opportunity. This MUST remain part of the investment we make to our children and in our community's future.

The other speakers during the public testimony did an excellent job explaining the science behind brain research that shows why early learning is so important, so I am instead going to share my personal story.

My 3-year-old child was a challenge to raise. He was inquisitive, sensitive, and awkward. He continued to have the kinds of tantrums one can expect in a 2 year old well into 5 years old - he was the kid kicking and screaming under the table. He had been kicked out of two preschools before the age of three, and by age 5 we were in counseling and he had been tested for ADHD, autism, asberger's and hearing deficiencies, and he was "borderline" on some of the results. If I had not found the Anchorage Cooperative Preschool, where my son and I received the support and guidance we needed to learn how to meet our social/emotional challenges, I am sure he would have ended up medicated with an IEP and not received the incredible opportunities he has had in our school's highly gifted programs since elementary school.

Preschool was not just about academics - in fact I would argue that the social/emotional learning that occurred there is exactly what allows for academic excellence later in life. Children in preschool learn to interact with both their peers and adults in a safe and appropriate environment. The learning that I as a parent received was just as valuable and the learning and growth that I saw in my children.

This is why I vehemently oppose cutting the early childhood programs in our public schools. Every child and family has a right to receive this!!! And with Kimmer Ball as the preschool teacher coach, these programs will thrive. She is the most highly qualified and dedicated educator I have ever met.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. I would gladly speak publicly or answer any direct questions. Feel free to call or email me.

Jennifer Gordon  
907-240-0206  
[Jengordonmom@gmail.com](mailto:Jengordonmom@gmail.com)

Jennifer Gordon, Owner Jen Gordon Consulting Communications Specialist, Small Business Consultant, Writer 907-240-0206 [www.jengordonconsulting.com](http://www.jengordonconsulting.com)

**From:** Likka McCauley [<mailto:mccauley.likka@gmail.com>]

**Sent:** Monday, February 20, 2017 12:01 PM

**To:** Rep. Daniel Ortiz <[Rep.Daniel.Ortiz@akleg.gov](mailto:Rep.Daniel.Ortiz@akleg.gov)>; [Harriet.Drummond@akleg.gov](mailto:Harriet.Drummond@akleg.gov)

**Subject:** PreK

Dear Representative Ortiz and Drummond,

Please do not cut state funding for PreK. As a school principal, PreK not only offers a jump start to many students who would otherwise not receive many opportunities for school readiness, it also allows for early identification and intervention for the neediest students.

Sincerely,  
Likka McCauley

**From:** [mrspilgrim@live.com](mailto:mrspilgrim@live.com) [<mailto:mrspilgrim@live.com>]

**Sent:** Monday, February 20, 2017 11:58 AM

**To:** Rep. Daniel Ortiz <[Rep.Daniel.Ortiz@akleg.gov](mailto:Rep.Daniel.Ortiz@akleg.gov)>

**Subject:** Pre-K Importance

Dear Representative Ortiz,

I am writing to voice my support of state funding for the Pre-K programs in our public school system and to ask for that you please help protect such funding.

When my son Noah turned three he was barely speaking. He was frustrated emotionally that we could not understand him and this caused him to withdraw and the happy boy started to slip away. Noah qualified for pre-school and speech therapy and within months he started gaining words. His growth in speech as well as social skills would not have been possible without his AMAZING teacher Alisa Thompson.

I implore you to please support these programs because our children deserve to have access to such a vital tool in their development.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,  
Amanda Pilgrim

-----Original Message-----

From: suniga\_merlee [[mailto:suniga\\_merlee@asdk12.org](mailto:suniga_merlee@asdk12.org)]

Sent: Monday, February 20, 2017 11:56 AM

To: Rep. Daniel Ortiz <[Rep.Daniel.Ortiz@akleg.gov](mailto:Rep.Daniel.Ortiz@akleg.gov)>

Subject: The Importance of Preschool

Good Morning,

As a Preschool teacher with the Anchorage School District, I am e-mailing to express my thoughts on the possibility of the Preschool program losing its state funding. I believe that Preschool is essential to a child's education. Preschool allows young children to socialize with their peers and to express themselves through creativity and imagination. Preschool has allowed so many learning opportunities for my students and their families. Preschool is so important and I encourage you to continue to support this program.

Thank you for your time,

Merlee Suniga  
Airport Heights Elementary  
Pre-K Teacher  
(907) 742-4550



-----Original Message-----

From: Kathy Paulson [<mailto:kathywpaulson@gmail.com>]

Sent: Monday, February 20, 2017 11:51 AM

To: [Harriet.Drummond@akleg.gov](mailto:Harriet.Drummond@akleg.gov); Rep. Daniel Ortiz <[Rep.Daniel.Ortiz@akleg.gov](mailto:Rep.Daniel.Ortiz@akleg.gov)>

Subject: Pre K education

Dear Ms. Drummond and Mr. Ortiz,

I am writing to you in support of pre-k education in our state. As a retired teacher I will say that there is nothing as important as this. Getting young children into school teaches them social skills, as well as those important literacy skills. Children that are not enrolled in preschool often start school behind, many never catch up.

I know this is important to you as well and I appreciate you making it a critical part of Alaska's education program.

Sincerely,

Kathy Paulson

Ketchikan

**From:** April Blevins [[mailto:april\\_blevins@lksd.org](mailto:april_blevins@lksd.org)]

**Sent:** Monday, February 20, 2017 11:45 AM

**To:** Rep. Daniel Ortiz <[Rep.Daniel.Ortiz@akleg.gov](mailto:Rep.Daniel.Ortiz@akleg.gov)>

**Cc:** Rep. Zach Fansler <[Rep.Zach.Fansler@akleg.gov](mailto:Rep.Zach.Fansler@akleg.gov)>; Gallanos, Anji W (EED) <[anji.gallanos@alaska.gov](mailto:anji.gallanos@alaska.gov)>; Carlton Kuhns <[carlton\\_kuhns@lksd.org](mailto:carlton_kuhns@lksd.org)>; Daniel Walker <[daniel\\_walker@lksd.org](mailto:daniel_walker@lksd.org)>; Ashley Crace <[ashley\\_crace@lksd.org](mailto:ashley_crace@lksd.org)>

**Subject:** testimony for DEED budget

Dear Representative Dan Ortiz,

Please see the attached letter and graphs that I would like to submit for public testimony regarding the Department of Education and Early Development FY18 Operating Budget.

Thank you for your time.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

April Blevins  
Early Childhood Education Coordinator/  
Migrant Education Specialist  
Lower Kuskokwim School District  
PO 305, Bethel, AK 99559  
1-907-543-4854 work  
1-907-543-4902 fax

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## **Investing in Our Future**

April Blevins

Early Childhood and Migrant Education Coordinator  
Lower Kuskokwim School District

Early childhood programs provide prevention and cost-effectiveness. Many studies have demonstrated the positive effects of participation in early intervention for school readiness, health status, academic achievement, reduced need for grade retention, and special education services. There is evidence to support delinquency prevention and higher educational attainment. ([Arthur J. Reynolds, PhD](#); [Judy A. Temple, PhD](#); [Dylan L. Robertson](#); et al)

### **Benefits of Early Childhood Programs:**

- **Closing Academic Gaps:** On the average, Lower Kuskokwim School District's four year olds enter preschool with receptive language skills of a 2.5 year old. When they exit our preschool programs and enter Kindergarten, most have gained 1.5 years of language to help close that gap.
- **The Domino effect:** If children cannot attend preschool, then parents cannot maintain a job. If parents cannot maintain a job, then children go without necessities such as food, which school provides twice daily. If there is no preschool program; then, there are no teachers (who are mostly hired locally). All of these factors affect a community economically, socially and academically.
- **Family Support Systems:** Preschool supports children academically, but it offers more support systems for families. There are monthly family events that offer parent education, literacy materials, socializing with like families, etc.... There are emotional supports through Social Workers, Behavioral Health, child psychologists, etc. Screenings are offered for early detection: dental, hearing, vision, and well child check ups. Families value early childhood programs as advocates for their child and family. It is considered a safe, welcoming, and nurturing environment for everyone.
- **Early Interventions:** School Districts and the State of Alaska will save money by investing in preschool programs. Early interventions while attending these programs, lead to fewer Special Education referrals and services when entering Kindergarten. Many delays such as developmental, language, gross/fine motor that would lead to Special Education referrals and services can be lessened with the interventions that children receive in preschool programs.
- **Significant Benefits:** The Perry Preschool longitudinal Study assessed preschoolers that attended a quality program versus a control group of non-preschool participants. Their findings show that at the age of 27, preschool participants had significantly higher earnings, rates of home ownership, and levels of schooling, as well as significantly fewer arrests and social service interventions, than a control group of non-preschool participants. Cost-benefit analysis revealed that, over the lifetimes of the participants, the preschool program returned to the

public an estimated \$7.16 for every dollar spent. (Schweinhart, Lawrence J.; And Others)

- **Academic Successes:** Please refer to the attached graphs According to MAP test scores, third and fourth students in Lower Kuskokwim School District that have attended an early childhood program score higher than their peers who have not attended a program. Students who attended the State Preschool Program in Napakiak and Bethel scored higher on their MAPS tests in Spring 2016 than their peers who did not attend a State preschool program.

Participation in an established early childhood intervention for low-income children was associated with better educational and social outcomes up to age 20 years. These findings are among the strongest evidence that established programs administered through public schools can promote children's long-term success.

Early educational interventions during the preschool years are widely touted as an effective way to prevent learning difficulties and to promote healthy development. Advances in the neuroscience of brain development have further accelerated interest and investments in the early years of life.

Early childhood programs have the potential for prevention and cost-effectiveness. In the past 2 decades, many studies have demonstrated the positive effects of participation in early intervention for school readiness, health status, academic achievement, reduced need for grade retention, and special education services. There is evidence for delinquency prevention and higher educational attainment. ([Arthur J. Reynolds, PhD](#); [Judy A. Temple, PhD](#); [Dylan L. Robertson](#); et al)

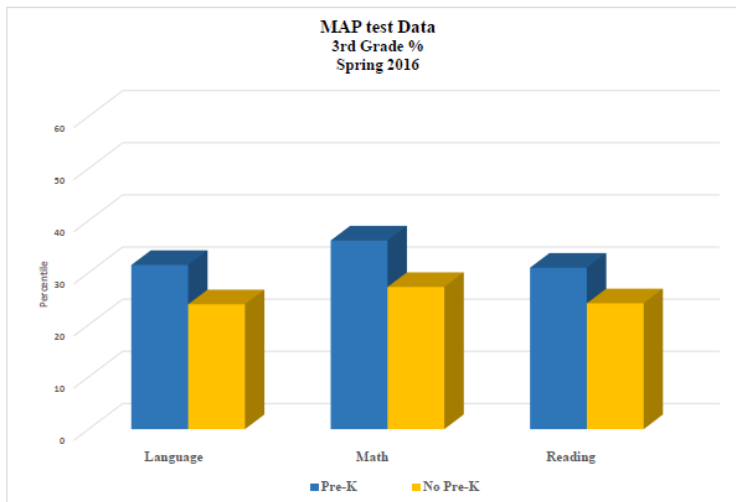
Yet, every year our early childhood programs are on the lists of budget cuts. If we are looking at saving educational dollars, research has proven that your money is best spent investing in our early childhood programs. For every dollar you spend in early childhood, you get \$7.16 in return.

It is time to do what is best for Alaska's children, invest and commit to early childhood programs. We need a stable, reliable early educational system that our children and families can depend upon. It is time to get off the fence, and invest in Alaska's future.



Lower Kuskokwim  
School District

### Lower Kuskokwim School District



Lower Kuskokwim  
School District

### Lower Kuskokwim School District

