

Investing in Alaska's Young Children



Alaska Early Care and Learning: Public Policy Priorities for 2012

A coalition of early childhood experts and leading organizations with representation across the state agree on these next steps to move toward healthy children ready to succeed in school, and toward a healthy workforce and economy in our state. These priorities rely on all children having access to a family health care provider. Denali KidCare is an essential support which should be expanded to ensure all children have access to health care.

Community Engagement and Early Literacy

Action for 2012

- Support Best Beginnings
- Increase local community efforts
- Increase Imagination Library enrollments



Strengthening Families

Action for 2012

- Fund Home Visiting through Parents As Teachers (PAT)
- Infant Learning Program increase to provide services to children who experience abuse and/or neglect



Access to Quality Early Care and Learning

Action for 2012

- Fund thread ROOTS Awards (Retaining Our Outstanding Teachers)
- Increase investment in Head Start



“Early childhood education is the driver of better outcomes and returns in secondary and higher education, health and economic development.”
-James Heckman, Nobel Laureate Economist, University of Chicago



Community Engagement and Early Literacy

Best Beginnings supports diverse groups in 80+ Alaska communities so that young children are prepared for success in school, and in life. Early childhood partnerships and Imagination Libraries receive resources – ongoing support, training, and matching funds – according to approved plans. Ten early childhood partnerships across Alaska are coming up with innovative ways to collaborate, use resources more effectively, and help families prepare their children for kindergarten. More than 16,600 children 0-5 in 80+ Alaska communities receive a free book in the mail every month through Imagination Library. Evaluation results are positive: children are read to more, have more books at home, and are more enthusiastic about reading -increasing the likelihood of their becoming good readers and graduating from high school.

This aligns with the Alaska Early Childhood Coordinating Council's priorities : (1) Expand early childhood services to 5,000 new children, and (6) Support and promote local partnerships.

Strengthening Families

Parents As Teachers (PAT) is an established family visiting program in communities throughout Alaska and the nation. Families involved in PAT programs increase their knowledge of child development, improve parenting practices, promote early literacy experiences, provide early detection of developmental delays and health issues, and increase children's school readiness and success.

Infant Learning Programs have experienced a significant increase in referrals as a result of the automated implementation of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA). This act requires early intervention referrals and services for all children under the age of three with substantiated reports of harm. An increment of \$3 million is needed to respond to the 1200 referrals anticipated in FY13. Early intervention with maltreated children helps protect early brain development through evaluation, ongoing services, and developmental/parenting information, resulting in improved outcomes for children.

This aligns with the Alaska Early Childhood Coordinating Council's priorities: (1) Expand early childhood services to 5,000 new children, (5) Embed "Strengthening Families" protective factors, and (7) Ensure every child will have full access to well-child exams.

Access to Quality Early Care and Learning Programs

ROOTs Awards are a cornerstone in improving the quality of child care. Alaska has been rated in the bottom ten states for quality of child care. Currently less than half of the children needing child care have access to a regulated child care program. There is a 46% turnover rate of child care workers, and many child care programs are unable to meet the minimum of staff qualifications. Teachers and caregivers are the leading indicators of quality. By providing professional development incentives, Alaska would demonstrate the significant gains realized by many other states to recruit and retain a more qualified workforce and child care for working families. **thread**, Alaska's Child Care Resource and Referral Network, manages the SEED Registry of early care and learning teachers and early childhood professionals and provides training to increase their skills and education. **thread** has the capacity to administer this workforce development award program.

This aligns with the Alaska Early Childhood Coordinating Council's priorities: (2) Increase the pay in early childhood settings, (3) Implement the QRIS (Quality Rating and Improvement System), and (4) Increase awareness of the Alaska Early Learning Guidelines.

Early Head Start and Head Start programs in Alaska are on the front lines of helping to intervene and prepare the most at risk children and families for success in school and in life. In the 2010/2011 school year 4,045 children were served in over 100 communities in Alaska. The primary criteria for eligibility is low income - 90 percent of the families served must be below 100 percent of poverty. 10 percent of slots must be reserved for children with disabilities. Families that receive Public Assistance, Foster Children, and Homeless Children are categorically eligible for services. Between the 08/09 and 10/11 school years Early Head Start and Head Start had the following increases in number of children enrolled in these categories: Public Assistance - 355 to 509; Foster Children - 107 to 144; Homeless Children - 187 to 408; Children with Disabilities - 407 to 504.

This aligns with the Alaska Early Childhood Coordinating Council's priorities : (1) Expand early childhood services to 5,000 new children.