

Expanded Eligibility for Alaska's Infant Learning Program (IDEA Part C)

**Leveraging the Power of Early Intervention Services
and Ensuring Equitable Access**

House Health and Social Services Committee

April 2, 2026

What is IDEA Part C?

Purpose and Funding:

- IDEA Part C is a federal program designed to support early intervention services for infants and toddlers (birth to age 3) with developmental delays or disabilities.
- Funded jointly by federal and state governments, it ensures services are available regardless of family income.

Alaska's Infant Learning Program (ILP):

- Administered by the Alaska Department of Health, the ILP is the state's implementation of IDEA Part C.
- The program supports infants and toddlers through individualized services delivered in natural environments, such as homes or childcare settings, emphasizing inclusivity.

Focus on Ages Birth to 3:

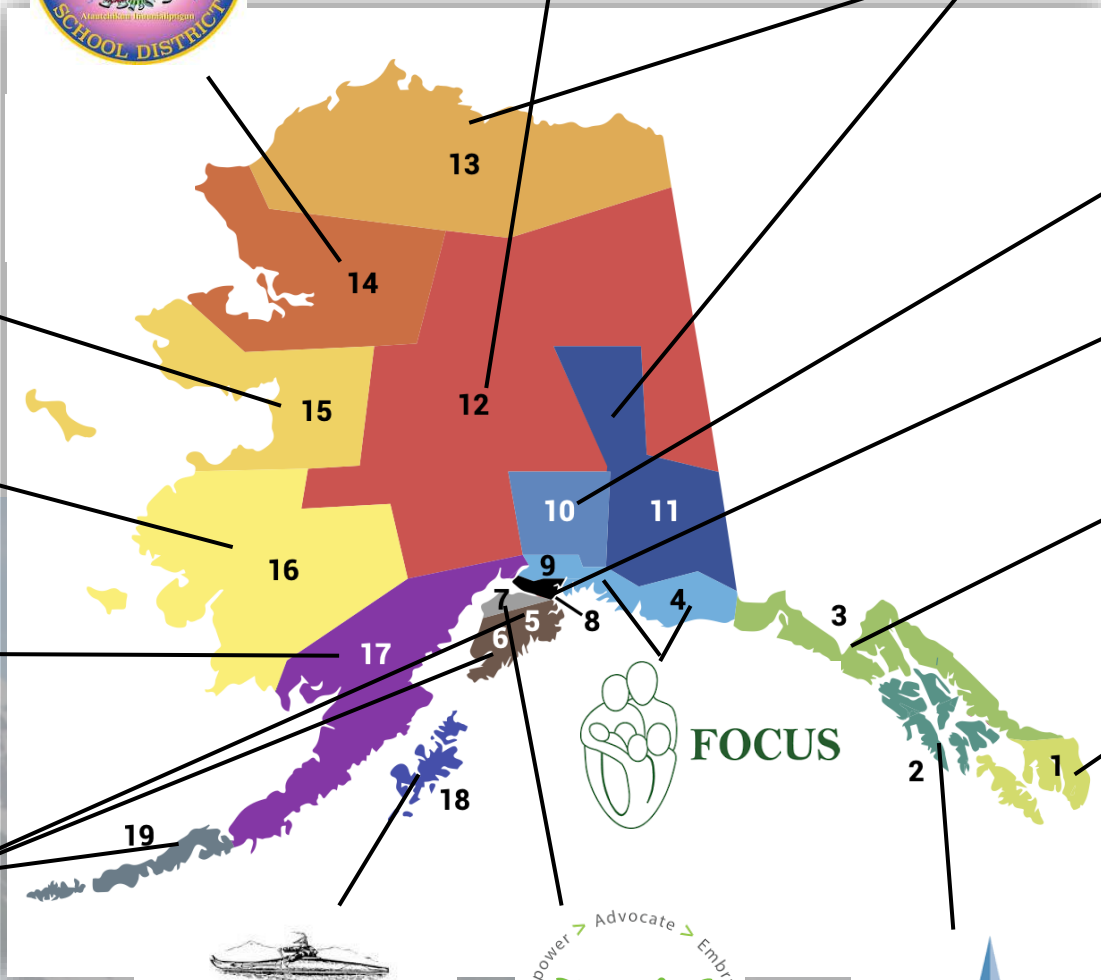
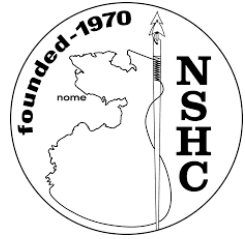
- The first three years of life are critical for brain development. Neural pathways for learning, behavior, and health are highly flexible during this period.
- Early intervention during this window can significantly improve cognitive, language, motor, and social-emotional outcomes.

Family-Centered Approach:

- Services are designed to empower families to become advocates and active participants in their child's development.
- Evidence-based practices focus on integrating interventions into daily routines to maximize developmental progress.

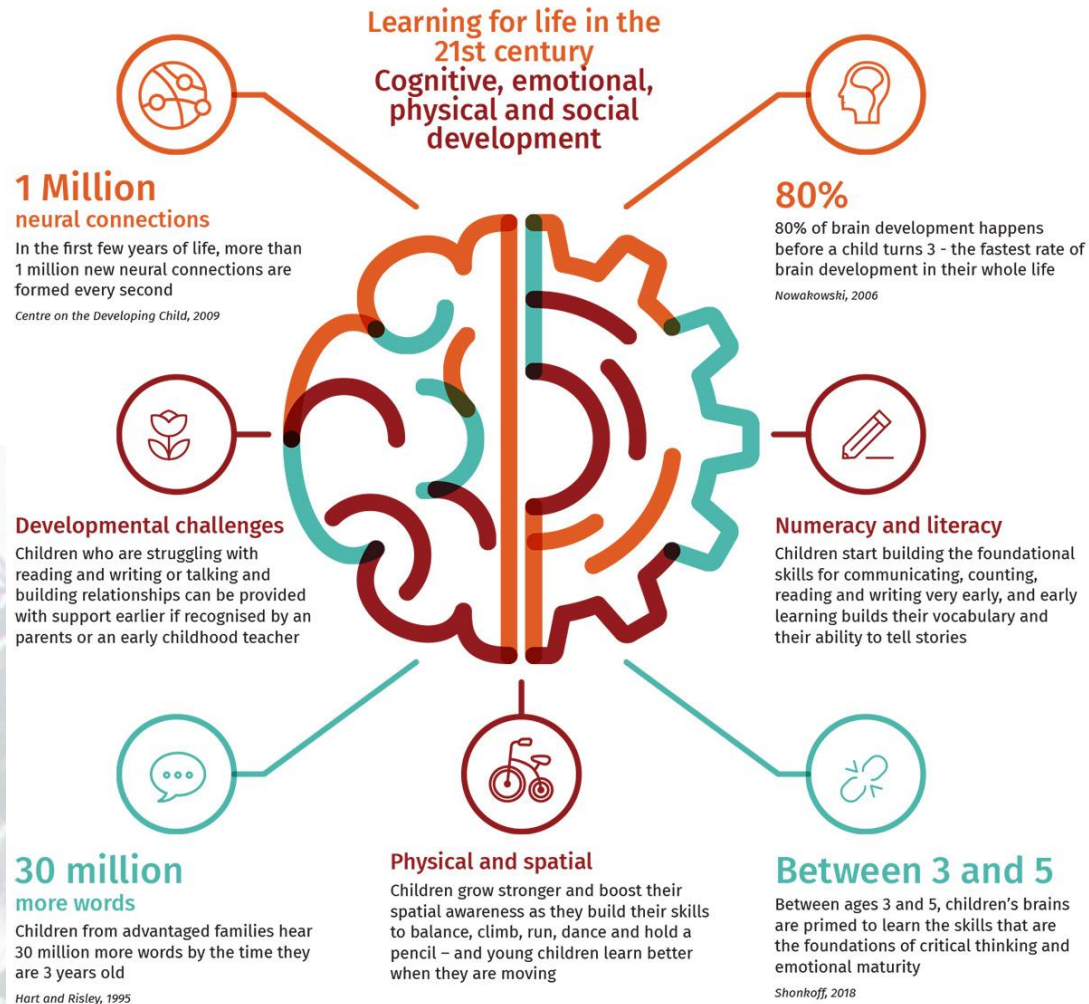


- 1 Ketchikan, POW Island, Metliakatla Area
- 2 Sitka, Kake, Angoon Area
- 3 Juneau, Haines, Petersburg Area
- 4 Cordova, Valdez Area
- 5 Seward Area
- 6 Homer Area
- 7 Kenai/Soldotna Area
- 8 Anchorage, Girdwood & Whittier
- 9 Eagle River, Chugiak, and JBER



- 10 Mat-Su Borough
- 11 Fairbanks, Copper River & Delta/Greeley
- 12 Interior Tanana Chiefs Region
- 13 North Slope Borough
- 14 Northwest Arctic
- 15 Norton Sound
- 16 Yukon-Kuskokwim
- 17 Bristol Bay Area
- 18 Kodiak Island
- 19 Aleutian and Pribilof Islands

Science of Brain Development



- **Neural Connections:** More than 1 million new neural connections are formed every second in the first few years of life.

- **Brain Development Speed:** Approximately 80% of brain development occurs before a child turns 3 years old.

- **Literacy and Numeracy:** Early learning fosters foundational skills for communication, counting, reading, and writing.

- **Words Heard:** Children from advantaged families may hear 30 million more words by age 3.

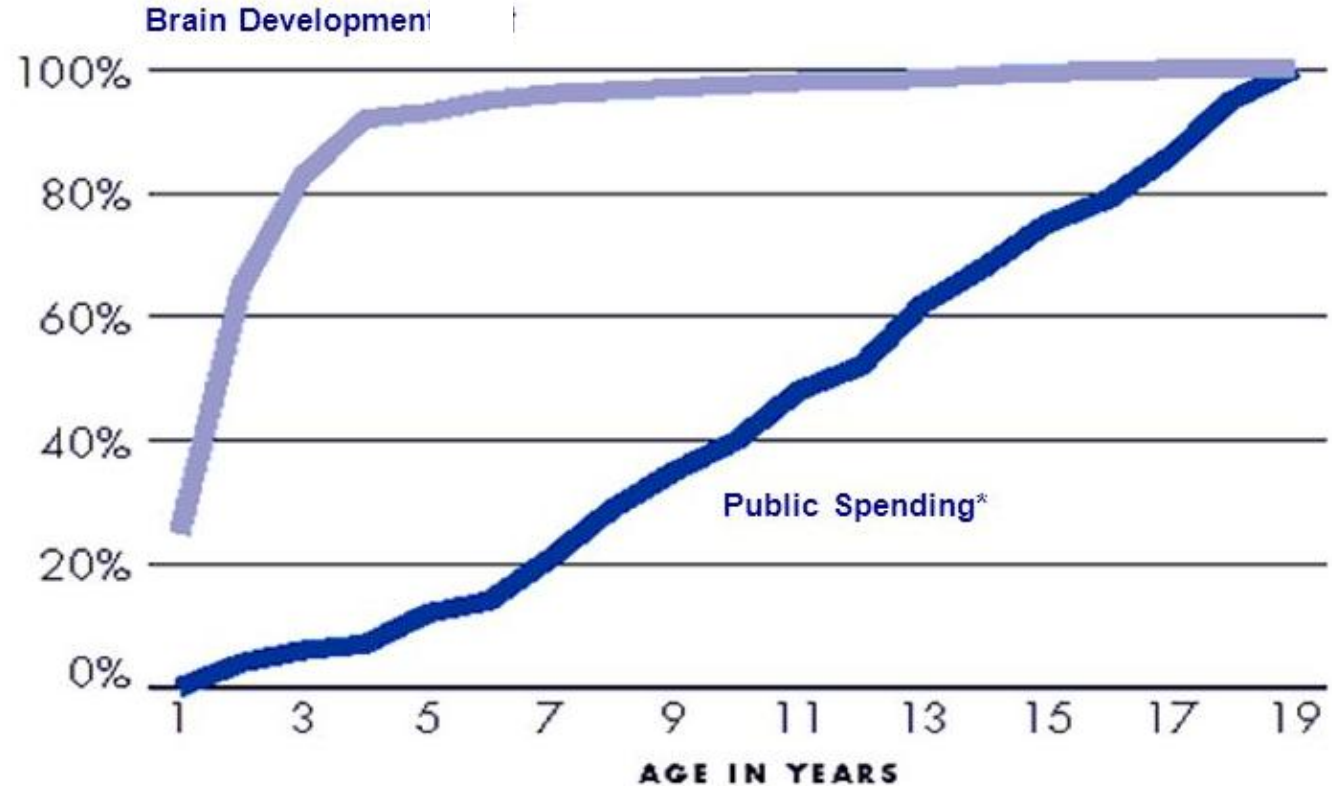
Invest Earlier

Almost 90% of brain development happens by age 3 and builds foundational learning.

Children who don't receive ILP services, may not be identified for support until Kindergarten or later.

Earlier services can lead to much greater impact!

PUBLIC SPENDING & BRAIN DEVELOPMENT THE DISCONNECT



* Portion of total public investment in children being spent during indicated year in children's lives.

Source: The RAND Corporation

Why Expand Eligibility?

Alaska has the most restrictive eligibility criteria for early intervention services in the nation.

Only two other states require a 50% developmental delay. Most states use 33% or 25%.
Alaska Part B (K-12 special education) uses a 25% threshold.
The difference results in delayed onset of services for children with 25-49% delay.

Often-cited studies by James Heckman have shown high return on investment for early intervention: ***For every \$1 invested, up to \$17 saved.*** *Heckman Equation. (n.d.)*

46% of children that receive early intervention don't require special education by the time they get to Kindergarten, which represents annual savings up to \$34.9M.

Early intervention improves long-term outcomes for children, families, and the state.

The Work That Led Us Here

2022 REPORT WORK BEGAN

Sponsored by Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education & Alaska Mental Health Trust

- Interagency Coordinating Council-Finance Subcommittee explored eligibility criteria and funding of Part C across the nation
- The resulting report listed recommendations to expand eligibility and improve the funding systems for AK ILP.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Align Part C criteria with Part B (25% delay in one domain of development or 20% in two) and update the list of qualifying conditions accordingly.
- Make supporting changes to the Medicaid statute
 - add new ILP provider type and reimburse for all ILP services
 - allow the IFSP as an authorizing document for Medicaid coverage

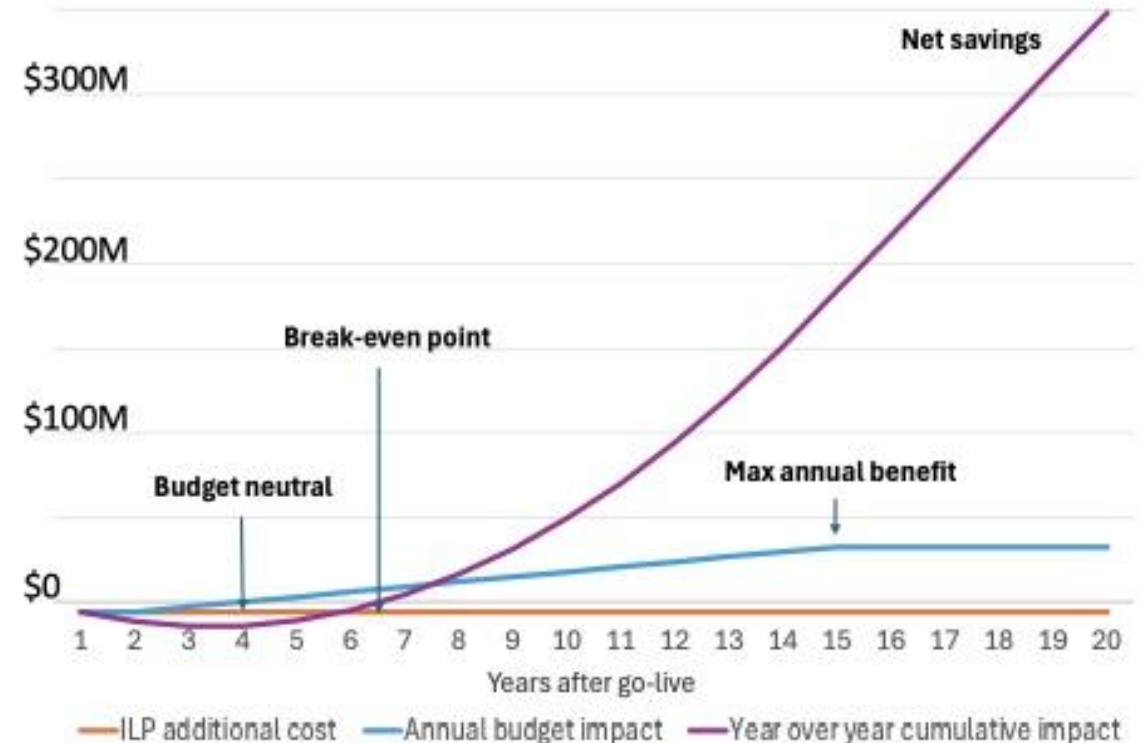


Savings to Alaska

- Budget neutral at 4 years
- Overall cost neutral at 6.5 years
- Backend cost avoidance/savings accumulate exponentially after that

Substantial Savings That Can Be Used for Other Education Needs

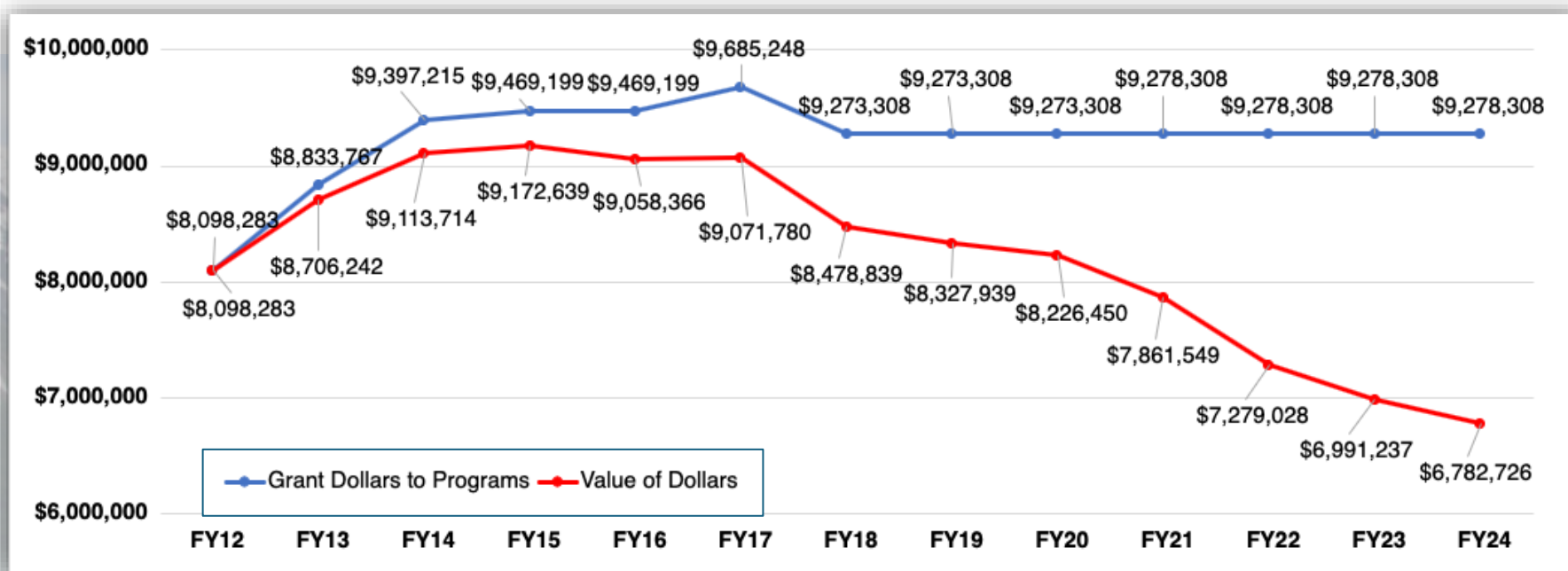
For each child that doesn't need special education due to ILP services, the state could save up to **\$229k**. Further savings from other services such as juvenile justice and adult Medicaid services are expected, but not easily quantified.



(Raviant, 2025)

Funding Challenge in Alaska

- Funding has been flat for a decade, while costs have risen 25%.
- Equity issues: rural and urban disparities in service availability.
- Individual children receive less frequent services due to funding deterioration.

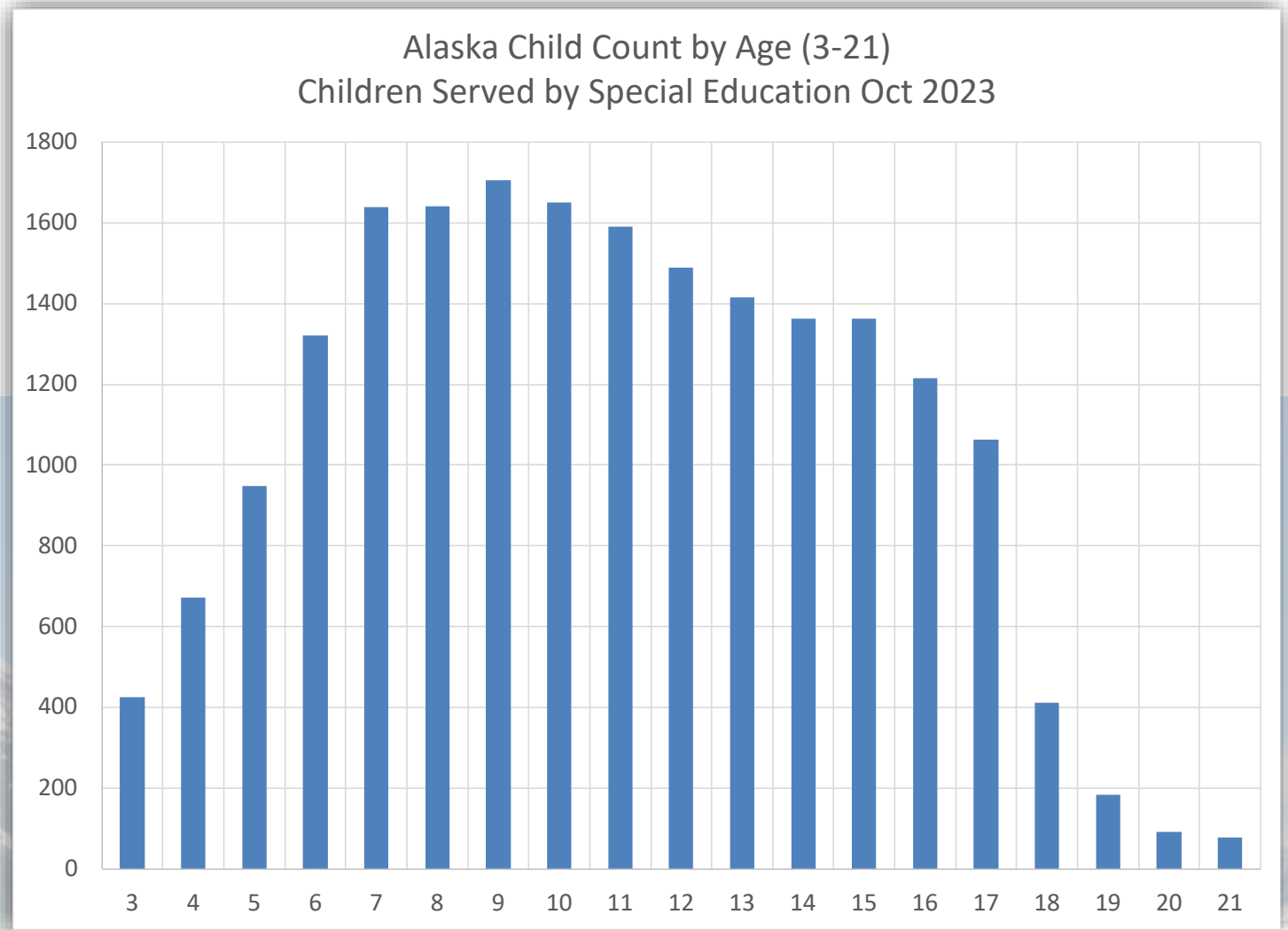


(Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, 2024).

(Alaska Department of Health, 2024).

Identification Challenge in Alaska

- Many children who ultimately qualify for special education are not identified until after age 6 and peaks at age 9.
- What would be the impact if identification was earlier?



(DEED, 2023-2024)

Rural Health Transformation Program

- AILPA has held conversations with ILP's and various State staff for the last two months to discuss RHTP funding and how to leverage this opportunity to expand services in innovative ways.
- Potential projects target:
 - Rural Program Enhancements
 - Efficiencies Across Regions
 - Technology Innovation
 - Workforce Retention & Development

Alaska's RHTP Goals and Initiatives



Goal 1: Promote Lifelong Health and Wellbeing for Rural, Remote, and Frontier Alaskans

Healthy Beginnings

Health Care Access

Healthy Communities

Goal 2: Build Sustainable Outcomes Driven Health Systems

Pay for Value:
Fiscal Sustainability

Goal 3: Drive Workforce and Technology Innovation

Strengthen Workforce

Spark Technology & Innovation

Thank You

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