



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR MIKE DUNLEAVY

**Department of Education
& Early Development**

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

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May 2, 2025

The Honorable Rebecca Himschoot
Co-Chair, House Education Committee
Alaska State Capitol, Room 411
Juneau, AK 99801

The Honorable Andi Story
Co-Chair, House Education Committee
Alaska State Capitol, Room 403
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Representatives Himschoot and Story,

This letter serves as a response to questions addressed to the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) at the Monday, April 28, 2025, House Education Committee meeting. All dollar figures presented in this document are in whole numbers.

1. Provide the application and approval process for the 0.5 ADM foundation formula grants. In addition, provide the process for district applications, DEED's approval process and implementation of the Alaska Reads Act Early Education Program Grant program.

Application for Early Education Program Approval and 0.5ADM/Formula Funding

For three cycles (FY2024, FY2025, and FY2026), DEED has used an application for Early Education Program Approval and 0.5 ADM/Formula Funding to identify districts who demonstrate quality and meet eligibility criteria to receive formula funding for four- and five-year old students (AS 14.07.020(a)(8)). The application format and process were revised prior to the FY2025 cycle; it now uses a Google format. The application for FY2026 EEP-ADM can be found [here](#). The bulk of the application workload resides in the [FY26 EEP-ADM main worksheet](#), which is aligned to the current [Early Education Program Standards](#). A panel review committee reviews each application to check for compliance with Alaska's Early Education Program Standards and other eligibility requirements, such as prevention of duplicate programs through consultation with any Head Start agencies operating within the district boundaries (AS 14.03.410(g)).

The release date of the FY2026 application was November 13, 2024. Two technical assistance webinars were offered in December 2024 in addition to on-going monthly webinars, monthly question and answer sessions, and individual technical assistance work sessions available upon request. The due date is May 15, 2025. Districts will be notified of approval by

September 1, 2025, per 4 AAC 60.210(e). Districts approved may count their eligible four- and five-year-old students in the fall OASIS count of the same year.

Currently, 10 districts have requested an application for FY2026. Seven districts requested an application for FY2025, three submitted complete applications. Six districts submitted applications for FY2024.

Early Education Program Grant (EEP)

The purpose of the Alaska Reads Act Early Education Program Grant (AS 14.03.410) is to provide funding for the development or improvement of a district-wide early education program. This grant supports districts to work towards the goal of meeting the [Alaska Early Education Program Standards](#) by the end of the three-year grant period, resulting in eligibility to receive 0.5 ADM funding.

The most recent release date was Tuesday, January 16, 2024. Two technical assistance webinars were offered. The due date was February 15, 2024. Nine districts applied and two districts were awarded funds through a competitive application process; these districts are operating on a FY2025 – FY2027 cycle. Seven districts were awarded funds in spring 2023, they are operating on a FY2024 – FY2026 grant cycle. There is a total of nine districts sharing a total annual allocation of \$2,999,900. The department prioritized districts with lower performance based on the System for School Success, the department's accountability system (AS 14.03.410(c)).

No Early Education Program Grant application was released in the spring of 2025 as the full \$2,999,900 annual legislative allocation has been allocated to current grant recipients. The next application period is scheduled to open in January 2026.

2. Which of the current standards in EEP Grant requirements align to Head Start performance standards. Describe the status of a proposed reduction in the application process to be considered at the next State Board of Education meeting.

The current Early Education Program Standards align with portions of Head Start Performance Standards from Part 1302 – Program Operations, Subparts C, D, E, and F. Additionally, the standards include Alaska Statutory and Regulatory requirements such as frequency and length of day in session, and requirements unique to Alaska's needs, such as a consistent assessment tool.

Changes are proposed to the Alaska Early Education Program standards in response to a 2024 amendment to AS 14.07.165(a) and feedback received from districts. The proposed changes will be heard by the State Board of Education at their quarterly meeting June 4, 2025. If approved, the Early Education Program Standards will only be aligned to Head Start Performance Standards from Part 1302 – Program Operations Subpart C, as is consistent with Title I requirements for preschool funding. Alaska statutory and regulatory requirements and requirements unique to Alaska's needs will remain.

The two major components which will no longer be required include Early Childhood Coaching and Mental Health Consultation. These proposed changes, if approved by the State Board of Education, will have the opportunity to put them out for public comment. After a public comment period the standards will then be up for adoption at the next State Board of Education meeting in the fall of 2025.

3. Identify the nine programs currently approved for the EEP Grant.

<i>Cohort One</i> <i>(FY2024, FY2025, FY2026)</i>	<i>Cohort Two</i> <i>(FY2025, FY2026, FY2027)</i>
Denali Borough School District Galena City School District Hydaburg City School District Iditarod Area School District Kake City School District Kuspuk School District Lower Kuskokwim School District	Alaska Gateway School District Northwest Arctic Borough School District

4. Provide a snapshot of Early Education Grant beneficiaries over the past few years, to include which school districts applied, those receiving funds, their outcomes, and if they have an active preschool today.

FY2024 EEP Grant Applicants that did not receive awards:

- Anchorage School District (they withdrew their application when they were awarded conditional approval for 0.5 ADM)
- Fairbanks North Star Borough School District
- Kodiak Island Borough School District
- Nome School District

FY2025 EEP Grant Applicants that did not receive awards:

- Bering Strait School District
- Kenai Peninsula School District
- Nenana City School District
- Petersburg School District
- Sitka School District
- Southeast Island School District
- Valdez School District

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School District Applying for EEP Grant	FY2024 to FY2026 EEP Grantee	FY2025 to FY2027 EEP Grantee	Other Prekindergarten State Funding in FY2025	Progress Towards Implementing EEP Standards (9 sections)	Active Prekindergarten 2024-2025 Classroom
Anchorage School District			ADM	9 sections	Yes
Fairbanks North Star Borough School District				unknown	Yes
Kodiak Island Borough School District			PEG	unknown	Yes
Nome School District			PEG	unknown	Yes
Bering Strait School District				unknown	Yes
Kenai Peninsula School District				unknown	Yes
Nenana City School District				unknown	Yes
Petersburg School District				unknown	Yes
Sitka School District				unknown	Yes
Southeast Island School District				unknown	No
Valdez School District			ADM	unknown	Yes
Denali Borough School District	x			8 sections	Yes
Galena City School District	x			6 sections	Yes
Hydaburg City School District	x			6 sections	Yes
Iditarod Area School District	x			6 sections	Yes
Kake City School District	x			5 sections	Yes
Kuspuk School District	x			5 sections	Yes
Lower Kuskokwim School District	x			6 sections	Yes
Alaska Gateway School District		x		4 sections	Yes
Northwest Arctic Borough School District		x		3 sections	Yes

5. Provide a condensed version of the current nine EEP Standards, to include the two Head Start standards which are in the process of being removed (Early Childhood Coaching and Early Child Mental Health Consultation), for an anticipated standards list of seven.

Alaska Early Education Program Standards

- I. Learning environment
- II. Social and emotional support (including requirement for Early Child Mental Health Consultation)
- III. Curricula
- IV. Screening and Developmental Evaluation
- V. Assessment
- VI. Family Engagement
- VII. Dual Language Learners
- VIII. Coaching
- IX. Continuous Quality Improvement

6. Describe the timeline of district applications, how many applied, how conditional approval was reached, and how many districts have reached full approval for 0.5 ADM formula funding.

Seven school districts submitted applications in 2023. One applicant, Anchorage School District, received conditional approval for implementing 80 percent of the Early Education Program Standards. This conditional approval was provided due to the short 2023 application period and limited time to implement the EEP Standards; Anchorage agreed to the goal of implementing all Early Education Program Standards by May 2024.

Seven districts requested applications in 2024, and four complete applications were submitted. Two districts, Valdez and Skagway, were granted approval. The conditional approval was provided as both districts documented 50 percent of the EEP Standards. They agreed to the goal of implementing all Early Education Program Standards by May 2025.

Anchorage School District successfully achieved full approval within one year and DEED anticipates that Valdez and Skagway will do the same. Ten school districts have requested applications for FY2026.

The re-application process will consist of the program outlining major changes, challenges, successes, and enrollment updates on a simple, one-page form that is signed by the superintendent. Districts will submit assurances verifying that they continue to implement the Early Education Program Standards.

7. How does the Pre-Elementary Grant (PEG) for three-, four- and five-year-olds, which is also on a three-year grant cycle, with a cap of \$3.2 million per year, differ from the EEP Grant?

Any Alaskan public school district was eligible to apply for the FY2024-2026 Alaska PEG with the purpose of planning for, beginning implementation of, or supporting existing programs that meet Alaska's Pre-Elementary Goals. The PEG grants differ from the EEP grants in that recipients are not required to work towards meeting the Early Education Program Standards, although many are.

Alaska Pre-Elementary Program Goals and Activities

Goal 1: Promote school readiness on positive outcomes in all areas of child development addressed in the [Alaska Early Learning Guidelines](#), build strong early childhood literacy by incorporating the appropriate areas of the [Alaska Literacy Blueprint](#), and align with the goals of their districts.

Goal 2: Identify and provide support for Alaska's children who are most in need of support.

Goal 3: Maximize parental choice and continuity of care, by encouraging community-based collaboration from a mixed delivery system of early learning support which includes state, federally funded, private, and non-profit early learning environments.

Goal 4: Support the use of child-reliable and valid assessment systems and tools to ensure programs are effectively measuring children's progress across all the domains in the [Alaska Early Learning Guidelines](#) and using assessment information to inform practice and inform policy decisions.

Goal 5: Support the transition of pre-elementary children to kindergarten through partnership and strong school and family relationships. Programs will build ongoing, long lasting, trusting relationships with parents, including them in decision making concerning curriculum and other aspects of their child's education and development.

Goal 6: Ensure that early childhood professionals have excellent preparation, ongoing professional development, and compensation commensurate with their qualifications and experience to provide the most effective teacher/child interactions.

8. What funding/statute changes by the Legislature are needed by DEED to fully implement Alaska Reads Act support the EEP Grant? Explain the \$3 million per year legislative appropriation cap on the 0.5 ADM formula funding.

The current Early Education Program Standards align with select components of the Head Start Performance Standards, specifically from Part 1302 – Program Operations, Subparts C, D, E, and F. They also incorporate Alaska Statutory and Regulatory requirements—such as the frequency and duration of instructional days—and include elements tailored to Alaska's unique needs, such as the use of a consistent assessment tool.

Proposed revisions to the Alaska Early Education Program Standards are being introduced in response to a 2024 amendment to AS 14.07.165(a) and feedback from school districts. These

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proposed changes will be presented to the State Board of Education at its quarterly meeting on June 4, 2025. If approved, the revised standards will align solely with Head Start Performance Standards from Part 1302 – Program Operations, Subpart C, which is consistent with Title I requirements for preschool funding. Alaska-specific statutory and regulatory requirements, along with locally relevant elements, will remain in place.

Two major components—Early Childhood Coaching and Mental Health Consultation—are proposed for removal from the required standards. These changes will be open for public comment following the June 2025 board meeting, with final adoption anticipated at the subsequent State Board of Education meeting in fall 2025.

In summary, DEED has observed that, in the initial years of implementing the early education requirements under the Alaska Reads Act, districts receiving Early Education Program (EEP) grants are better positioned to transition seamlessly into the 0.5 ADM foundation formula funding. These districts collaborate closely with DEED staff to build and enhance their programs in alignment with the Early Education Program Standards.

Currently, the \$3 million legislative appropriation for the EEP Grant is allocated to nine districts, with an average award of approximately \$333,000 and a median of \$312,000 per district. On average, five applicants per grant cycle have not received funding.

In response to feedback and insights gained during the first two rounds of the grant, DEED has refined the program to further support districts in developing high-quality early education programs.

Please don't hesitate to reach out with any additional questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Deena Bishop', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Deena Bishop, Ed.D.
Commissioner

cc: Jordan Shilling, Director, Governor's Legislative Office