



# BEST BEGINNINGS

## Alaska's Early Childhood Investment

### Outreach to Alaskans

Best Beginnings didn't invent early learning as an important issue. But in the last five years – coinciding with the emergence of Best Beginnings – early learning/early childhood development has become part of the Alaska lexicon. Awareness has exploded, in no small part because of Best Beginnings' work in the following areas:

- **Catalyst for collaboration**

Best Beginnings facilitated formation of an early childhood coalition, comprising five separate entities that address different aspects of early learning, to speak with one voice to policy-makers. Before the coalition organized, the voices for early childhood were uncoordinated and often in competition with one another.

- **Convener**

Best Beginnings led planning and implementation of the Governor's Summit on Early Learning in December 2007 and the Alaska Business Leader Summit in October 2009. We have brought together myriad large and small groups to discuss and work on early childhood issues. Through Best Beginnings' efforts, national speakers such as businessman Bill Millett and neuroscientist Dr. Lise Eliott have shared their expertise with Alaskans in Fairbanks, Anchorage, and Juneau.

- **Public outreach**

Through a comprehensive communications strategy, Best Beginnings has begun to permeate the public consciousness in Alaska about early learning and early childhood development. This strategy includes:

- **Radio PSAs:** Since 2008, radio stations all over Alaska have broadcast Best Beginnings messages on a wide range of topics related to early learning and early child development, particularly about early brain development.
- **TV PSAs:** The impact of our TV PSAs is illustrated by this example: in the last six months of 2012, GCI cable broadcast Best Beginnings TV PSAs a whopping 92,507 times in markets all over Alaska. Best Beginnings has also produced and co-produced paid TV and radio on themes such as strengthening families and parents as a child's first and most important teachers (with renowned anthropologist Dr Sven Haakanson as the engaged father). Best Beginnings has tapped Alaskans' love of dogs and dog mushing, with a very effective TV spot featuring Martin Buser and his puppies ("It all starts in the puppy pen.").

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*Best Beginnings* is a public-private partnership that mobilizes people and resources to ensure all Alaska children begin school ready to succeed.

- **Op-ed columns:** Best Beginnings seeks to stimulate public conversation through opinion columns on topical issues related to early learning. The most recent, on how showing up for school is a habit learned early, appeared in the Anchorage Daily News, Sept. 2.
- **Earned media:** Since we began formal tracking in January 2012, Best Beginnings has earned articles or mentions in more than 113 media sites. These include TV, radio, print and electronic media.
- **Website:** Best Beginnings maintains an active, dynamic, highly professional website that provides easy access to a wide range of information and resources for parents, policy makers, early childhood professionals, and the general public. Our website traffic has exploded since we first went online in November 2007. In the first full year, 2008, the website had 6,333 total visits and 23,783 total page views. In the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2013, our website saw 43,824 total visits (68% jump from the previous year) and 79,933 page views (45% growth over the year before).
- **Facebook:** Best Beginnings established its Facebook page Dec. 14, 2009. Our “likes” continue to grow, as do our reach and virality. For example, for the week of April 12, 2010, we had 366 “likes.” As of Sept. 5, we’re at 1,182 “likes.” Weekly reach varies, but in the last six months, we’ve hit a highly respectable peak of 2,466.
- **Resource Materials** (in addition to the website)
  - **Activity Guides and Cards:** Based on the Early Learning Guidelines endorsed by the State Board of Education & Early Development, Best Beginnings published activity guides in Yup’ik and Spanish and Yup’ik/English activity cards. In addition, we facilitated printing the English version. They are being distributed across the state; requests from places as far away as South America are still coming in!
  - ***Babies on Track:*** Best Beginnings produced a 14-minute video for parents of children under 2 packaged with two Alaska-themed board books – all to help families see the quick, everyday ways they can help their babies’ brains grow. Sets were distributed through 167 “movie premieres” in 80 communities across the state the last week in February 2012. Parents who attended were given a free *Babies on Track* set to take home. Additional sets have been distributed to parents through several different organizations. They are also available for sale to individuals, agencies and organizations, and retail outlets. They are being used in creative ways. For example, women giving birth in Barrow watch the video with their OB nurse so there is opportunity for conversation and teaching.
  - **StoryTRACKS:** Nicknamed “storybooks on parade,” StoryTRACKS sets are pages from storybooks mounted on placards, affixed to stakes, and installed temporarily along trails, at parks, at family picnics or parties – anywhere families and young children are gathered. They can be checked out at no cost. Anchorage Park

Foundation's challenge grant is providing support. Five have been completed; there will be 20 in all. StoryTRACKS combines reading with children and physical activity.