

# Investing in Alaska's Young Children



## Alaska Early Care and Education: Public Policy Priorities for 2010

**Denali Kid Care:** Increase the income eligibility guidelines for Denali Kid Care (DKC) from 175% to a minimum of 200% of Alaska's federal poverty level (FPL). This change would restore eligibility to 1,300 children and 225 pregnant women. Children with access to preventative health care and developmental screenings have better outcomes for health and learning abilities throughout their lives.

**Head Start:** Increase State investment in Head Start to: expand services, address critical infrastructure needs, and keep existing slots from being reduced to due to rising costs. Provide workforce development funds to enable Alaskan Head Start staff to meet federal teacher qualification requirements.

**Home Visiting:** Establish research-based voluntary early childhood home visiting programs in Alaska, such as *Parents as Teachers*, with universal access for families with children prenatal up to kindergarten entry. Such programs increase parent 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 school success. Through these preventative programs, future costs such as special education and remedial education have been shown to be reduced.

**Best Beginnings:** Support community-based **Early Childhood Partnerships** and **Imagination Library**. This leverages funding from the private sector and helps support the public-private partnership working to create and sustain a comprehensive statewide early childhood system. **Early Childhood Partnerships** provide a statewide coordinated network and structure necessary to move decisions closer to those being served, pinpoint actual needs, respond to cultural considerations, and ensure the best outcomes for young children in every community. **Imagination Library** mails a book per month to Alaska children from birth to age 5. Research shows that children who have not developed some basic literacy skills by the time they enter school are three to four times more likely to drop out in later years. Too many Alaska children, about 40%, are entering kindergarten without those skills. This program makes a difference by bringing quality books into the home, engaging young children and their families in early literacy activities.

**Access to Quality Child Care:** Increase child care reimbursement rates to the 75th percentile. This allows low-income children the opportunity to access higher quality programs, resulting in outcomes such as increased school readiness. Increase family eligibility to 85% of the state median income. This will enable the state to quantify and respond to support for families to enter or remain in the workforce.

**Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS):** Implement phase one of QRIS in Alaska. A QRIS is an organized method to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early care and education settings outside the home. The system would provide a roadmap for individual early learning programs to improve their quality of care, thereby increasing parent access to a larger supply of quality options. The system would provide greater accountability for policy makers who govern public investments in Alaska's early care and education system and would ensure that publicly funded Pre-K services can be delivered through a variety of delivery systems that meet the needs of parents.

**Professional Development and Retention of Early Educators:** Provide funding to **thread**, **Alaska's Child Care Resource and Referral Network**, to increase the current Individual Reimbursement Awards (IRF's) for college child development courses, and reinstate the ROOTS (Retaining Our Outstanding Teacher) Awards to recognize and incentivize teachers with credentials in early education. There is a direct relationship between teacher preparation and quality of early care and education for children. It is difficult for individuals working full-time and earning low wages to afford the cost of education. In addition, due to low wages and lack of recognition, the teacher turnover rate in Alaska in early care and education programs is approximately 46%. By providing these incentives, the early care and education field would be able to recruit and retain a more qualified and stable workforce.

These priorities are recommendations articulated in no particular order. The recommendations are meant to assist public policy leaders in developing a system of early learning to promote school readiness, strong families, and a strong workforce. These are advanced by a coalition of early childhood advocates working together to support young children.



The Alaska Child Care Resource and Referral Network, **thread**, has a mission to advance the quality of early education and child development by empowering parents, educating child care professionals and collaborating with our communities.

[www.threadalaska.com](http://www.threadalaska.com)



Best Beginnings is a public-private partnership that mobilizes people and resources to ensure all Alaska children begin school ready to succeed through support from businesses, foundations, nonprofits, government, and individuals.

[www.bestbeginningsalaska.org](http://www.bestbeginningsalaska.org)



The Alaska Association for the Education of Young Children's mission is to lead, facilitate, and support the effort of those working in the Early Care and Education profession throughout Alaska.

[www.akaeyc.org](http://www.akaeyc.org)



The Alaska Head Start Association is a membership organization providing a united voice of advocacy and leadership on issues affecting Alaska's Head Start children and families.

[www.akheadstart.org](http://www.akheadstart.org)



The Alaska Infant Learning Professional Association-AILPA is a member organization to advocate for and support high quality early interventions services for infants and toddlers with special needs and their families.