



**BEST BEGINNINGS**  
Alaska's Early Childhood Investment



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2010 :: REPORT *to* ALASKANS

LETTER *from*  
THE EXECUTIVE  
DIRECTOR

EARLY LEARNING: AN INVESTMENT *without* RISK

Abbe Hensley, *Executive Director*

In finance, the biggest rewards carry the highest risk. When it comes to early learning, the bigger the investment, the greater the rewards, and the lower the risk. The more we do, the more likely we are to reap success on a grand scale. Doing nothing is the riskiest “strategy” of all. The components of quality early learning – positive and purposeful parenting, high quality and accessible child care and early education programs – build strong brains during the critical years from birth to 5.

Quality early learning is a guaranteed investment in Alaska’s future. It’s an opportunity we can’t afford to pass up. Growing children into thriving, contributing adults requires a whole lot of work at the front end, in the earliest years of life. What happens in a child’s earliest years has profound impacts on cognitive, physical, emotional, and social development.

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More and more, we read and hear about the gains to be made from investing in young children. Research on brain development in the earliest years is capturing attention far beyond neuroscience circles. And economists and business leaders are becoming some of the most articulate and influential proponents of investments in early childhood.

Here in Alaska, momentum is building, and Best Beginnings is proud to be an instigator of positive developments and a strong supporter of good works by others. The momentum shows in numerous ways:

- Imagination Library is expanding to more communities, engaging families in the fun of reading.
- More tools are available to support parents as they help babies’ brains grow in positive ways.
- Business leaders are realizing the high stakes, in terms of employee productivity today, the skills needed for tomorrow’s workforce, and the implications of global competition.
- The State of Alaska is conducting a pilot project for state-funded preschools, an important step toward high quality and affordable preschool accessible to all.
- Alaskans are forming early childhood partnerships to determine how best to meet the needs of young children in their own communities.

As with most investments, it requires patience. Important change doesn’t happen overnight and this one is no exception. We have plenty of work yet ahead – and many allies to share the challenges.

MANAGEMENT  
and STAFF

Best Beginnings is governed by the Early Learning Council, a panel of community leaders from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors.

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EARLY LEARNING COUNCIL

SUSAN ANDERSON, President & CEO, The CIRI Foundation  
MARGARET BAUER, Director, Work Life Services, Providence  
Health & Services Alaska  
MICHELE BROWN, President & CEO, United Way of Anchorage  
LESLIE ELLIS, CEO, Credit Union 1  
ERNIE HALL, Owner & Manager, Alaska Furniture  
Manufacturing, Inc.  
BILL HOGAN, Commissioner, Alaska Department of Health &  
Social Services  
SUE HULL, Member, Fairbanks North Star Borough School  
Board  
BERNICE JOSEPH, Executive Dean, College of Rural &  
Community Development, University of Alaska Fairbanks  
LARRY LEDOUX, Commissioner, Alaska Department of  
Education & Early Development  
EDNA MACLEAN, President Emeritus, Ilisagvik College  
ANNEMARIE MATTACCHIONE, Representative, Alaska Head  
Start Association  
BRAD MCKIM, Managing Attorney, BP Exploration Alaska  
IRA PERMAN, President, Important Work  
CATHRYN RASMUSON, Trustee, Rasmuson Foundation  
CARL ROSE, Executive Director, Association of Alaska School  
Boards  
TAMMY SANDOVAL, Representative, Alaska Department of  
Health & Social Services  
SARAH SCANLAN, Deputy Director, RurAL CAP  
DAVID WIGHT, President & CEO, Retired, Alyeska Pipeline  
Service Company  
CANDACE WINKLER, CEO, thread: Alaska's Early Care &  
Education Connection

CIRCLE OF CHAMPIONS

DEBORAH BONITO, President,  
Sourdough Mercantile, Inc.  
CAROL COMEAU, Superintendent,  
Anchorage School District  
SHARON GAGNON, PH.D., Advocate,  
Early Childhood Literacy and  
Learning

BEST BEGINNINGS STAFF

ABBE HENSLEY, Executive Director  
MELINDA MYERS, Senior Manager  
BARBARA BROWN, Project Manager  
KAERIN STEPHENS, Administrative  
Coordinator

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**BEST BEGINNINGS**  
Alaska's Early Childhood Investment

## ABOUT BEST BEGINNINGS

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Number of  
children in  
Alaska,  
birth to 5  
**49,670**

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Best Beginnings is a public-private partnership organized in 2006 to mobilize people and resources to ensure all Alaska children begin school ready to succeed. Best Beginnings receives funding and support from businesses, foundations, nonprofits, government, and individuals. United Way of Anchorage provides financial management services.



### KEY OBJECTIVES

- Parents and extended family are engaged in their children's learning from birth on.
- Child care and early learning programs are high quality, affordable, and accessible to all families who want them.
- Alaskans understand that early childhood learning is important and that investments in early childhood pay big dividends to the state as a whole.
- Sufficient funds are committed – from public and private sources – to ensure every Alaska child has the opportunity to begin school ready to succeed in school and in life.
- A comprehensive, coordinated early childhood system is in place in Alaska.



CURRENT  
PORTFOLIO

BOOKS for KIDS: IMAGINATION LIBRARY

About 40% of Alaska children begin school unprepared to succeed. 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 later. Alaska's dropout rate is among the highest in the nation.

Having new books of their own is a powerful way for children and their parents to become more engaged in positive learning experiences. The more children know and understand about "book reading" and what it represents before they enter school, the better prepared they will be for success.

“Having new books of their own is a powerful way for children and their parents to become more engaged in positive learning experiences.”

Best Beginnings has become the Alaska statewide coordinating entity for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, which mails a high-quality age-appropriate

book each month to children from birth to age 5. There is no cost to the family.

Since Best Beginnings first became involved in Imagination Library in 2008, Imagination Libraries have expanded and sprouted all over the state. As of November 2009, funding was in place to enroll 10,322 babies and young children in Imagination Library.

In communities that already have an Imagination Library, Best Beginnings helps expand their capacity to send books to more children. In other locations, Best Beginnings provides technical and administrative assistance, and grants to establish new Imagination Libraries. Statewide grants to Best Beginnings leverage matching contributions – \$157,000 in 2009 – from within the communities. In addition to raising local funds, volunteers promote the program, register the children, and maintain a database.

As of year-end 2009, 16 Imagination Libraries were serving 31 communities: Anchorage, Angoon, Craig, Eagle, Fairbanks North Star Borough, Juneau, Kake, Kenai/Soldotna, Klawock, Koliganek, Little Diomed, Matanuska-Susitna Borough, Mentasta, Moose Pass, Nanwalek, Nome, Northway, Old Harbor, Seward,

Children funded  
for Imagination  
Library in 2009  
**10,322**



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Communities  
participating in  
early childhood  
partnerships  
**20**

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Sitka, Tanacross, Tetlin, Tok, Toksook Bay, Unalaska/Dutch Harbor, Wasilla, and Wrangell. Best Beginnings is also working with the Kuskokwim Education Foundation to establish an Imagination Library for 10 villages on the Kuskokwim River.

In a related program, board books are being distributed to Alaska Native families through Nutaqsiivik, a home visiting program of Southcentral Foundation. Babies in those homes, as well as children in two Head Start programs for Alaska Native children, have also been enrolled in Imagination Library.

Best Beginnings' Imagination Library work is supported by grants from the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development, Rasmuson Foundation, ConocoPhillips Alaska, and The CIRI Foundation.

#### EARLY CHILDHOOD PARTNERSHIPS

When business and community leaders, parents and child care professionals, service providers and educators work together on early childhood issues, they can make a powerful difference in the lives of young children and their families. People at the local level understand and are most familiar with the issues, assets, needs, and challenges of their children.

Local partnerships organized around early childhood bring decisions closer to those being served, pinpoint actual needs, respond to cultural considerations, and ensure the best outcomes in each community for young children. Local partnerships bring people together to solve problems. They cross traditional boundaries and power structures to combine resources and focus on solutions, not turf.

Best Beginnings is leading efforts to build a network of local early childhood partnerships in Alaska. Adapting a model successful in other states, Best Beginnings awarded small one-year grants to nine communities to organize partnerships or build on partnerships already in place. Best Beginnings' work in this area is supported by grants from the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development, ConocoPhillips Alaska, and BP Alaska. In addition, local sources have contributed financial and in-kind support that exceeds the state and corporate contributions.

“People at the local level understand and are most familiar with the issues, assets, needs, and challenges of their children.”

Best Beginnings seed grants were awarded to partnerships in Anchorage, Fairbanks North Star Borough, Gustavus, Hoonah, Juneau, the southern Kenai Peninsula, Ketchikan, Kodiak, and Matanuska-Susitna Borough.

The partnerships are assessing local needs and assets, identifying local priorities, and developing two-year strategic plans for meeting those priorities.

## BUILDING BRAINS *in* MULTIPLE LANGUAGES

Best Beginnings has published a series of guides with fun, brain-building activities for babies, toddlers, and preschoolers. All activities described in the guides are based on the State of Alaska's Early Learning Guidelines and are designed to prepare young children to succeed in school and in life.

Spanish-language activity guides were published in 2008, followed by a Yup'ik version in 2009. The Spanish and Yup'ik guides were developed with assistance from Spanish-speaking and Yup'ik advisers to ensure the activities are culturally and geographically appropriate. Best Beginnings also assisted with the publication of English guides. Many of the activities are available on the Best Beginnings Web site.

The guides were funded by grants from the Alaska Children's Trust and the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development, with additional support from BP and ConocoPhillips Alaska.

## PUBLIC OUTREACH

Best Beginnings is working on several fronts to encourage Alaskans to help ensure all children begin school ready to succeed.

Public service announcements are produced and broadcast statewide on radio and TV with a wide range of messages. Topics include the importance of reading and other learning experiences, how to play and interact effectively with babies and toddlers, and the effects of early learning on workforce productivity and the economy.

These PSAs are a collaboration with Alaska Public Telecommunications, Inc., parent company of public stations KAKM TV and KSKA-FM. Best Beginnings also has produced television PSAs and paid spots through collaborations with the Alaska Children's Trust, KTUU, and GCI.

In other public outreach efforts, staff and volunteers give presentations and participate in panels. In 2009, they spoke at more than 30 events on topics ranging from Imagination Library and early childhood partnerships, to the business case for early learning and legislative priorities. Best Beginnings'

representatives have been featured guests on in-person and radio discussion forums, locally and statewide.

Best Beginnings continues to use conventional media and information channels of other organizations to publicize events and activities.

Traffic to Best Beginnings' Web site is growing every year. Visits and unique visitors in 2009 jumped 101% and 111%, respectively, over 2008. Best Beginnings also started a Facebook page.

## OUTREACH *to* BUSINESS COMMUNITY

Best Beginnings is building relationships with Alaska's business community through small meetings and larger presentations to business and civic leaders across the state. Initial meetings have been held in Barrow and Bethel. Additional small gatherings are planned in 2010.

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“Best Beginnings spoke at more than 30 events on topics ranging from Imagination Library and early childhood partnerships, to the business case for early learning and legislative priorities.”

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To engage business leaders statewide, Best Beginnings convened an Alaska Business Leader Summit on Early Childhood Investment. Forty Alaskans participated in the summit, which was co-hosted by Providence Health & Services, Northrim Bank, Alaska State Chamber of Commerce, and Doyon Limited. Funding was from the Partnership for America's Economic Success and the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development. Providence Health & Services and ConocoPhillips provided in-kind support for the event.

The summit shared information about the importance of early childhood programs in raising future employees competitive in the 21st Century workplace; provided opportunities for business leaders to connect with peers who share their commitment to the future; and engaged business leaders in advocating for additional investments in strategies proven to encourage the successful development of young children.



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Households  
reached by  
Best Beginnings  
TV PSAs  
**150,000+**

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National speakers were Bill Millett, President/CEO of Scope View Strategic Advantage, and neuroscientist Dr. Pat Levitt. Millett presented the business case for early childhood learning. Dr. Levitt, from the Keck School of Medicine at USC, addressed early brain development and the relationships between positive learning experiences and future success. Mr. Millett and Dr. Levitt also spoke at public venues.

#### BUILDING an EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM

Services for young children are uncoordinated. Each program or service has its own objectives, rules, funding sources, and paperwork requirements. Without coordination and alignment, the nearly inevitable result is gaps in service, overlapping missions, and confusion among the families such services are designed to serve. Too often, parents don't know what's available or how to access services.

Early learning is entwined with other facets of early childhood development. A child's brain growth is bound to suffer if he is hungry or chronically sick or in front of a TV for hours at a time for lack of high-quality child care.

Young children do best when they are served by a statewide early childhood system that empowers families, links service providers, and engages communities on behalf of young children.

That is why it is so important that early learning partnerships are organized locally. The partnerships are laying the foundation for a statewide coordinated effort to help citizens, community leaders, and institutions recognize the importance of early childhood and become involved in supporting policies and investments for young children in Alaska. The

value of such a network has long been recognized by policy makers and early childhood advocates.

Best Beginnings is working with state agencies, other nonprofit organizations, parents, foundations, and corporate partners to develop a statewide early childhood system that is culturally responsive, comprehensive, and accessible to all.

“Young children do best when they are served by a statewide early childhood system that empowers families, links service providers, and engages communities on behalf of young children.”

Best Beginnings has been a major catalyst in the effort to organize an Alaska Early Childhood Advisory Council. The council's purpose will be to promote positive development, improved health outcomes, and school readiness for Alaska children, prenatal through age 8. The council will support creation of a unified, sustainable system of early care, health, education, and family support for young children and their families.

## INVESTORS 2009

All Alaskans have a stake in building a statewide system that provides and supports quality early learning at home and in away-from-home programs. Many of our most prominent corporations, as well as nonprofit and philanthropic organizations, small businesses, individuals, and government understand the implications of success and the consequences of inaction. Their support makes our work possible.

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### MAJOR SUPPORTERS (\$50,000+)

- Alaska Department of Education & Early Development
- Alaska Humanities Forum
- BP Alaska
- Rasmuson Foundation

### SUPPORTERS (UP to \$25,000)

- Alaska Children's Trust

- ConocoPhillips Alaska
- Partnership for America's Economic Success
- The CIRI Foundation

### IN-KIND SUPPORT (\$75,000+)

- Alaska Public Telecommunications, Inc.
- Smart Start's National Technical Assistance Center
- United Way of Anchorage

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The following organizations provide financial assistance or other valuable forms of support to Best Beginnings.

### FRIENDS

- Alaska Association for the Education of Young Children
- Alaska Department of Health & Social Services
- Alaska Head Start Association
- Alaska State Chamber of Commerce
- Buster Consulting & Communications
- Doyon, Limited
- Northrim Bank
- Providence Health & Services
- Raven Management Consulting
- Rural Alaska Community Action Program, Inc.
- Safeway, Inc. in honor of Steve Brezenksi
- thread: Alaska's Early Care & Education Connection
- University of Alaska Anchorage

### INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTORS

- Michele R. Farnam

- Willie & Abbe Hensley
- Patricia McDaid
- Brad & Kay McKim
- Chris & Melinda Myers
- Michael Oblath
- Susan Ruddy in honor of Tina & Ralph Lynch
- Matthew Streiff
- Lance E. Throp
- Nancy Wagner

### MEDIA PARTNERS

- Alaska Public Telecommunications, Inc.
- Aleutian Peninsula Broadcasting, Inc.
- GCI Communications Corp.
- KINY Radio – Juneau
- KNOM – Alaska Radio Mission
- KTOO Public Radio, Juneau
- KTUU, Channel 2

IMAGINATION  
LIBRARY –  
LOCAL INVESTORS  
(\$100+)

Community support is a basic principle of Imagination Library. Volunteers run each program and solicit financial contributions within the community. As a statewide coordinator for Imagination Library, Best Beginnings provides technical assistance and leverages direct funding to promote community support. Individuals, businesses, and organizations all over Alaska have invested in their local Imagination Libraries. In addition to those listed below, hundreds of individuals have contributed up to \$100. We thank all of them for their support.



ANCHORAGE :: \$1,000+

Communities In Schools  
Fred Meyer Foundation  
Nordstrom  
Target  
United Way of Anchorage

Anne Wien Elementary School PTA

Auto Service Co.  
John & Kelly Brown  
Bucher Glass, Inc.  
C&A Cleaning Service  
Charlie & Jan Cannon  
JB Carnahan

ANCHORAGE :: \$100 to \$999

GCI

Jim Cerney, DDS, PC

Gail Chagnon  
Silver Chord

FAIRBANKS :: \$1,000+

ConocoPhillips  
Downtown Rotary of Fairbanks  
Doyon, Limited  
Fairbanks Memorial Hospital  
Golden Heart Rotary Club  
David Hollingsworth  
Sue & Robert Hull  
Kiwanis Club of Fairbanks  
McDonalds Ambrose LLC  
Span-Alaska Transportation  
Sunrisers Rotary  
Toyota Auto Service Co.  
Russ & Nancy Wagner

College Rotary

Lt. Col. Harry & Katie Cook  
Gary Corrick  
Barbara Day  
Delta Kappa Gamma  
Design Alaska  
Dimond Fence Co., Inc.  
Angela Dowler  
Denise Edgerton  
Fairbanks Educational Assoc.  
Fairbanks Emblem Club #109  
Bev Fantazzi  
Fort Wainwright OSC  
Denis & Patricia Fox  
Suzanne Graves

FAIRBANKS :: \$100 to \$999

3 Tier – Alaska Engineering  
Alpha Delta Kappa Zeta  
Alyeska Pipeline Service Co.  
Louise Anderl  
Betty Anderson

Gulivers

Jennie Hafele  
Leslie Hajdukovich  
Jimmy & Barbara Hameister  
Dr. Christopher Henry, DMD  
Kay Hinckley

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Local funds  
leveraged for  
Imagination  
Library in 2009  
**\$156,716**

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Hops Hallmark  
Rodger & Sue Hughes  
Ronald Inouye  
J.P. Jones Community Development Center  
Montean Jackson  
Kevin Jelinek  
Colleen Johnston  
Julie Scott Retirement Plans  
Scott Kawasaki  
Cheryl Keepers  
Kiwanis Club of Chena  
Judy Krize  
Sandra Lachman  
Eric Madsen  
Michael Mavencamp  
Michael Miles  
Mary Mitchell  
Morris Tutorial  
Mt. McKinley Bank  
NTL Alaska, Inc.  
Tanya O'Brien  
Optimist Club of Fairbanks  
Molly Palmer  
Phyllis Pendeergrast, DMD, PC  
Gayle Pierce  
Powerhouse, Inc.  
Jack & Suzanne Randolph  
Tammy & Ed Randolph  
Taber Rehbaum  
Retired Teachers  
Amy Richards-Weigers  
Melissa Rickey  
Tom & Bonnie Roberts  
Brian Rogers  
Katherine Sanders  
Lynda Sather  
Gary Sawdy, DDS  
Bett Schaffhauser  
Seekins Ford-Lincoln-Mercury, Inc.

Linda Setterberg  
Shiffler Educational Services  
Slayden Plumbing & Heating, Inc.  
Patricia Stark  
Lisa Sundborg  
Lynda Tanner  
Usibelli Foundation  
Dale Verly  
Vertex Insulation  
David Weaver  
Ellen Whitcher  
Gary & Sue Wilken

JUNEAU, WRANGELL, CRAIG, KLAWOOCK,  
ANGOON, KAKE, SITKA :: \$1,000+  
AEYC  
Bartlett Regional Hospital  
Communities In Schools of Alaska  
Communities In Schools of Juneau  
Dornan Douglas Foundation  
Friends of the Juneau Public Library  
KTOO  
United Way of SE Alaska

JUNEAU, WRANGELL, CRAIG, KLAWOOCK,  
ANGOON, KAKE, SITKA :: \$100 to \$999  
Alaska Glacier Seafoods  
Alaska Pacific Bank  
Beta Sigma Phi, Wrangell  
Kathy & Doug Blanc  
Elsa Demeksa & Peter Froehlich  
Epsilon Sigma Alpha International,  
Alaska Alpha Theta Chapter  
ESA Foundation  
Mary Claire Harris  
Bill Jacoby  
Juneau Public Health staff  
Joy & Rich Lyon  
PEO, Chapter G

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Increase in  
Web site visits,  
2008 to 2009  
**101%**

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REFAX Inc.  
Roland & Pam Machold  
Albert Shaw  
Anne & Doug Standerwick  
Ed & Cathy Thomas  
Wrangell Emblem Club  
Wrangell Firefighters

KENAI :: \$1,000+  
Soldotna Rotary

KENAI :: \$100 to \$999  
Randy Daly  
Chris & Sarah Hough  
Kenai Peninsula Reading Council  
Marion Nelson  
Peninsula Health Center

MEADOW LAKES (MATANUSKA-SUSITNA  
BOROUGH) :: \$1,000+  
Communities In Schools  
Wasilla Sunrise Rotary

MEADOW LAKES :: \$100 to \$999  
Friends of the Wasilla Library  
Sherri Rusher  
Susitna Rotary

NOME :: \$100 to \$999  
Alaska Airlines  
Communities In Schools  
Patrick & Paula Johanson  
Morgan's Snow Mobile Sales  
Nome Eskimo Community  
Nome Literacy Association  
Nome Public School District  
Wells Fargo

SEWARD :: \$1,000+  
City of Seward  
Seward Community Foundation

SEWARD :: \$100 to \$999  
Adelmann Family/Bear's Den B&B  
American Legion Post 5  
Jennifer Carrick  
Duane Chase  
Harbor Enterprises Inc./Petro Marine Service  
Rhonda Hubbard  
Jolund & Monica Luther  
Moriarty Family/Dentistry  
Linda Rae Olsen  
Oriental Garden  
Peking Restaurant  
Qutekcak Native Tribe  
Resurrection Bay Lions Club  
Scenic Mountain Air  
Seward Bike Shop  
Seward Elks #1773  
Seward Real Estate  
Shoreside Petroleum  
Ray Simutis/Ray's Waterfront  
Train Lake View Luxury Cottage

TOK & TANACROSS :: \$1,000+  
Tok Community Umbrella Corporation

TOK & TANACROSS :: \$100 to \$999  
Conversify.net  
Tok Community Clinic, Inc.

UNALASKA/DUTCH HARBOR :: \$1,000+  
Unalaska City School District

## CREDITS



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WRITING & COORDINATION *Buster Consulting & Communications*



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