

# Investing in Alaska's Young Children



## Alaska Early Care and Learning: Public Policy Priorities for 2011

A coalition of early childhood experts and leading organizations with representation across the state agree on these next steps to move toward healthy children ready to succeed in school, and toward a healthy workforce and economy in our state. 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. These priorities are recommendations articulated in no particular order, to build a comprehensive approach in our early care and learning system.

### **Innovation, Accountability, and Statewide Coordination**

Alaska needs effective programs that are implemented well, evaluated regularly, and improved continually.

#### **Action for FY12**

**Support local community efforts to address early care and learning priorities through Best Beginnings.**

#### **Background**

**Best Beginnings Local Partnerships:** Through Best Beginnings, increase support for community-based early childhood partnerships. With support from Best Beginnings, early childhood partnerships in 11 communities are working to improve coordination of programs and services, and promote better use of resources. All young children have the same basic needs. But their needs can be met in different ways, depending on a community's values, resources, interests, and culture. People in a community are in the best position to identify what children in their town or region need and how to fill the gaps. Funding for Best Beginnings 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 Literacy and Family Engagement**

Helping parents establish and maintain healthy, strong bonds with their children right from the start is an effective and cost-efficient way to reduce later costs such as unemployment, corrections, and remedial education.

#### **Action for FY12**

**Fund Home Visiting through Parents As Teachers (PAT)**

#### **Background**

**Home Visiting:** Fund statewide coordination and increase access to Parents As Teachers (PAT). PAT is an established home visiting program in communities throughout Alaska. Families involved in PAT programs increase their 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 success.

**Increase enrollment of eligible children in the Imagination Library (IL)**

#### **Best Beginnings: Imagination Library Early Literacy and Family Engagement:**

Through Best Beginnings, increase statewide support for Imagination Library, which mails a new book each month to Alaska children from birth to age 5. Best Beginnings leverages public and private dollars to match locally-generated funds and provide technical assistance to local Imagination Libraries. Research shows children who begin school without some basic literacy skills by the time they enter school are three to four times more likely to drop out in later years. Evaluation of this program in Alaska says children are read to more and are more enthusiastic about books and reading.

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## Access to Quality Early Care and Learning Programs

Over 62% of children under age 6 in Alaska (43,000) have all the adults in the workforce, yet there are only spaces for 18,357 in recognized child care programs. Over half of children are in unknown care.

### Action for FY12

**Reinstate thread ROOTS Awards (Retaining Our Outstanding Teachers)**

**Increase thread support for parents seeking child care for children with special needs through the AK IN! program**

**Increase State of Alaska Investment in Head Start**

### Background

**Professional Development and Retention of Early Educators:** Provide funding to **thread**, Alaska's Child Care Resource and Referral Network, to reinstate the ROOTS (Retaining Our Outstanding Teachers) Awards to recognize and incentivize people working in licensed child care programs with credentials in early education. Teachers and caregivers are the leading indicator of quality in early childhood programs. 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.

**Inclusion of Children with special needs in child care:** Fund **thread**, to increase support for parents seeking child care for children with special needs, and to increase the ability of child care programs to offer appropriate services through the existing Alaska IN! program. Accommodations are assessed to qualify for a supplement to child care assistance rates. Additional funding is needed to provide case management, on-site consultation, and to provide supplements for children served by the Office of Children's Services, who are currently not covered under the program.

**Head Start:** Head Start programs in Alaska have a long and successful history of providing at-risk children and families the tools and support necessary to promote school readiness. Programs operate in communities across the state and face various challenges. Rural and remote programs typically encounter challenges with facility upkeep and increased operational costs, programs in more populated areas cannot keep up with growing waiting lists and the need for increased services, and all programs struggle to meet unfunded federal professional development mandates and deadlines. By increasing investment in Head Start we will continue to make progress in decreasing waiting lists and increasing school readiness efforts.

## Access to Health Care

### Action for FY12

**Increase income eligibility guidelines for Denali Kid Care**

### Background

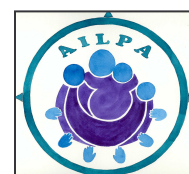
**Denali Kid Care (DKC):** Increase the income eligibility guidelines for DKC from 175% to a minimum of 200% of Alaska's federal poverty level (FPL). This change would restore eligibility to 1,300 children. Children with access to preventative health care and developmental screenings have better outcomes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

*"Early childhood education is the driver of better outcomes and returns in secondary and higher education, health and economic development."*

*-James Heckman, Nobel Laureate Economist, University of Chicago*



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



**thread**