

Early Learning Overview

States as well as communities make important choices about how much they invest in early learning strategies that can improve the odds for healthy early childhood development. The achievement gap for low-income young children starts early in life and is difficult to reverse. What science says about brain development, along with what is known from economic analysis, makes it clear that investing in early learning is essential to reducing this gap.

The focus of the Governor's Summit on Early Learning is on ensuring children are ready to learn and succeed in school. With that in mind, the Governor's Summit is looking at the current picture of Alaska's early learning system, what could improve that picture for Alaska's children and families, and how various sectors can contribute to these improvements.

But what is Alaska's early learning system? We find young children in two primary places, "In the Home" with parents or relatives and "Out of the Home" in early care and education programs. Reaching and supporting young children means ensuring the adults that care for and educate them have information about child development and early learning strategies.

In the Home

Parents are a child's first teacher. Strategies to support parents include home visiting, resource centers, literacy programs, informal community supports, classes, online resources, and early intervention. These strategies are available to stay at home parents as well as parents who may use out of the home early care and education programs depending on what community they live in.

Out of the Home

As of 2004, approximately 63% of children under the age of six (39,400) live in a household with two working parents or live in a single parent household where the parent was working. The majority of these children spend time in programs such as certified preschools, child care centers or homes, Head Start, or school district preschools.

A successful early learning system will address:

- Quality
- Accountability
- Accessibility
- Affordability
- Parent Involvement

There are many strategies for early learning that cross both in the home and out of the home settings. For example, the Early Learning Guidelines (ELGs) inform parents, caregivers, community members and leaders about expectations for a young child's development and learning at the end of four stages, regardless of where they spend the majority of their day. Another strategy being implemented helps young children, starting with infants and toddlers, with the social-emotional, language, and academic skills they need to succeed in school.

Information in this section addresses some key aspects of quality early learning in Alaska.

Resource Paper on Early Learning