

Early Literacy Programs in Alaska

Parents in Alaska want their children to have a “best beginning” in life. This includes providing them with pre-literacy skills that will prepare them to learn to read when they enter school. Current research shows Alaskans are reading frequently to their children and that they value the importance of reading to their children. However, Alaska, like other states around the nation, is still struggling to ensure children arrive at school with these early literacy skills. Families need assistance to find quality children’s books that depict life in their community, as well as having easy access to them. For many communities, the only resource is school libraries, which are limited in loan policies and hours of operation.

Below are examples of early literacy programs that are currently working in Alaska to address these issues.

ABC Read and Talk With Me

ABC Read and Talk With Me distributes free book bags through the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program, the Child Care Assistance Office, and Child Care Connection, Inc. Parents learn about the importance of early learning on brain development and are exposed to fun ways to share books with their children. In addition, the ABC project and Child Care Connection developed a series of early education classes for child care providers and caregivers to help ensure Anchorage's youngest children are exposed to early learning practices from birth.

Book bags consist of an Alaskan themed book, another book in either English or in one of five other languages, informational brochures on early literacy and learning, a refrigerator magnet, a finger puppet, and a "Read Aloud" training video for early childhood educators. They are distributed after parents and early childhood educators participate in informational sessions on how to engage a child in simple early literacy and learning activities.

Program Cost:

- \$10 per book bag (for children)
- \$15 per book bag + read aloud video (for early childhood educators)

Web site:

- muni.org/firstlady/abc.cfm

Even Start Family Literacy Program

The Even Start Family Literacy Program is a federally funded program that was reauthorized under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. Even Start is designed to break the cycle of poverty and illiteracy in low-income families. To do this, Even Start provides a unified program of adult education, parenting education, early childhood education services, interactive parent and child literacy activities, and builds on existing high-quality community resources where appropriate. Even Start programs serve families with young children who are most in need of services. The Alaska Department of Education and Early Development provides support and funds to three Even Start Family Literacy Programs throughout the state.

Imagination Library

Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library mails a brand new age-appropriate book each month to every child under five who signs up for the program in their community. “Community” can be defined as a town, village, or area where a group of people live or are joined by a common tie (i.e., section of town, etc.). A community must make the program accessible to all preschool children in their area. The community pays for the books and mailing, promotes the program, registers the children, and records the information into the database. From there the Dollywood Foundation takes over and manages the system to deliver the books to the home.

Program Cost:

- \$30 per child, per year

Raising A Reader (RAR)

Raising A Reader (RAR) fosters healthy brain development, parent-child bonding, and early literacy skills critical for school success by engaging parents in a routine of daily “book cuddling” with their children from birth to age five. It is a child-driven program encompassing early childhood educators, parents, and librarians in a coordinated “read-aloud” effort. Each week, bright red book bags filled with beautiful picture books are rotated into homes.

Early childhood educators are taught ways to engage parents in “read-aloud” strategies anchored in language development research and storytelling traditions. These approaches can help inspire low-literacy or limited English-speaking families to share books with their children. The program and its materials are age-appropriate and tailored to suit the diverse cultural traditions and ethnic and linguistic demographics present in the United States today.

Program Cost:

- \$3000 per classroom, per year

Reach Out and Read (ROR)

Reach Out and Read (ROR) promotes early literacy by giving new books to children and advice to parents about the importance of reading aloud in pediatric exam rooms across the nation. It makes literacy promotion a standard part of pediatric care with the goal that children grow up with books and a love of reading.

ROR trains doctors and nurses to advise parents about the importance of reading aloud. Books are given to children at pediatric check-ups from six months to five years of age with a special focus placed on children growing up in poverty. By building on the unique relationship between parents and medical providers, Reach Out and Read helps families and communities cultivate early literacy skills so children enter school prepared to succeed at reading.

Program Cost:

- \$10 per child, per year, plus staff time