



Recommendations for 2020:

- *thread* recommends Pre-K (Pre-Kindergarten) services be provided and available in a mixed delivery system — Pre-K as school-based or high quality community-based early childhood education settings.
- Invest in Learn & Grow and Alaska SEED for high quality early childhood programs and teachers.

thread's Mission

To advance the quality of early education and child development by empowering parents, educating child care professionals, and collaborating with our communities.

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Early Childhood Education in Alaska

2020 Policy Fact Sheet

At **thread**, we have a vision for the future of child care and early childhood education programs: Families in Alaska have access to high quality, affordable early childhood education programs for their children. If realized, this vision means the early childhood education system supports children's growth, development, and educational advancement and creates positive impact for families and communities. It also means that we value and compensate our early childhood educators accordingly.



A Child's Early Brain Development

Decades of research tells us that the early years of life (ages 0-3) are a period of exponential brain development, characterized by great opportunity and vulnerability, dependent on the relationships and environments in which the child is growing.¹ Simply put, early experiences determine whether a child's brain wiring will provide a strong or weak foundation for all future learning and behavior.



High Quality Settings Matter

While parents are a child's first teacher, the reality is many working families with young children depend on community-based early childhood education programs (child care, Pre-K, Head Start, tribal and military care). On average, the children of working mothers spend about 36 hours a week in early childhood education programs. Given the amount of time children spend in programs, the quality of the setting has a direct impact on child development and learning.

The Heckman Equation

By Nobel Prize-winning University of Chicago Economics Professor James Heckman

- +** **INVEST**
Invest in educational and developmental resources for disadvantaged families to provide equal access to successful early human development.
- +** **DEVELOP**
Nurture early development of cognitive and social skills in children from birth to age five.
- +** **SUSTAIN**
Sustain early development with effective education through to adulthood.
- =** **GAIN**
Gain a more capable, productive and valuable workforce that pays dividends to America for generations to come.

Quality early childhood education nurtures the whole child, including their social, emotional, physical and cognitive development.

Research shows a connection between high quality early childhood education and school success. High quality settings:

- Help shape a child’s social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development.
- Improve a child’s school readiness and ultimate school performance, which leads to fewer grade retentions, fewer referrals to special education, fewer high school drop outs, fewer incarcerations, and increases economic growth for communities.

[Investing in Our Future: The Evidence Base on Preschool Education]



Challenges Families Have with Early Childhood Education

Finding available, affordable, and quality early childhood education programs is a challenge that working families face throughout Alaska.

For many families, it’s simply hard to find an early childhood education program. **thread**, Alaska’s statewide child care resource and referral network, helps thousands of families every year find quality early childhood education programs in their communities.

Many families report difficulty affording child care.

Alaska is one of 15 states where both the annual cost of center-based infant care and center-based preschool care exceeds the annual cost of tuition and fees at four-year state public colleges. In fact, Alaska is one of many states where the annual cost in both centers and family child care homes for children under age 5 exceeds the annual cost of college tuition!²

More than 100,000 children are in need of care, including children in households where adults are not able to be fully employed due to lack of access to early childhood education.



Affording child care is a challenge for most families, but particularly for those with more than one child and for those with low incomes.

Some financial assistance is available, but not enough. About 12,000 families with children under age 11 live in low-income working families. Yet, on average, about 3,300 children each month receive a subsidy for their families to help make the cost of child care more affordable.



Average annual cost of center-based care in Alaska is more than college tuition:

Infant: \$11,700

Pre-school: \$10,764

Despite family income level, most families struggle with the cost of affording community-based early childhood education programs.

The quality of care is also a concern to families.

In Alaska, there are promising solutions to ensure all children in early childhood education programs experience high quality in the future. Learn & Grow, Alaska’s Quality Improvement and Recognition System (QRIS), together with Alaska’s System for Early Education Development (SEED), create a system designed to offer all early childhood education programs an opportunity for continuous quality improvement, and educators a system for professional development.



A Strong Economy Depends on a Skilled Workforce

The forces of globalization and technology continue to redefine the knowledge economy: tomorrow’s workers must rely more on brain than on brawn. Technological improvements have led to escalating skill requirements, and globalization has contributed to the loss of many labor-intensive and digitally transferable jobs in the United States.²

What is clear is that individuals need to achieve education beyond a high school degree and need to develop advanced technical skills. What we know is that the most formative years of brain development come well before a child starts kindergarten.

A robust early childhood education system provides a stable workforce for Alaska. The most recent data for Alaska shows for children under age 6:²



58 percent

live in two-parent families where both parents work.



36 percent

live in a single-parent family where the parent works.



Why High Quality Early Childhood Education Programs, Including Pre-K, Make a Difference

thread supports expanding early childhood education programs including Pre-K. Expanding Pre-K gives working families more affordable and high quality program options. **thread** recommends Pre-K be provided and available in a mixed delivery model to allow for full-day and full-year program options that families want and need.

It is far more expensive to intervene during the K-12 years to help keep a child on track than it is to make an early investment to start children on track. In Alaska, about 7,000 children repeat a grade between kindergarten and high school. About 21 percent of children do not graduate on time (or drop out).

High quality Pre-K helps children start school ready to succeed.



Mixed Delivery Systems Work Best for Families

Pre-K can be school-based, but does not have to be to meet the needs of children and families. Supporting quality Pre-K in community-based child care programs is a sound example of public-private partnership.

Many states offer Pre-K in mixed delivery settings. For example, North Carolina and New Mexico offer more than half their Pre-K classrooms through child care centers. This works in communities because the 4 year-olds are already engaged in a program. Families need full-day care (not full “school-day” care but full “working day” care).

By offering Pre-K through community-based early childhood education programs such as quality child care, families and children benefit. Families have the work support that they need and children have continuity in early childhood education, which is important for healthy development.



The Connection Between Quality Pre-K and School Success

The 2019 National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) average reading scores for Alaska’s 4th grade children were lower than the average scores of 4th graders in 50 other states.¹⁰

- 4th graders eligible for free and reduced priced lunch had an average score that was 32 points lower than their peers.

- 66 percent of Alaska Native 4th grade students read below grade level.

How children fare on 4th grade reading tests is directly related to their readiness to start school when they first entered.

The research shows that we can do better. We can help children enter school ready to succeed by offering full-day high quality Pre-K.



The Research on “Return on Investment”

The Chicago Child Parent Centers (CPCs) were similar to current state Pre-K programs in design and cost. The Chicago Longitudinal Study reported a \$7.14 to \$1 benefit-cost ratio.⁶

The High/Scope Perry Preschool Program that operated in the Ypsilanti, Michigan school district has been estimated to have a benefit-cost ratio of \$16 to \$1 (40 years after children attended).⁷



Studies show that a high school graduate earns \$569,000 more over a lifetime than a student who does not complete high school.⁶

One year of full-day Pre-K at age 4 can raise future earnings by 10 percent. This increases the present value of future earnings for former child participants by about \$50,000, at a cost of about \$10,000, for a benefit of 5 to 1.⁸

A meta-analysis from leading researchers describes the rate of return in two ways:⁹

- Benefits may come from cost savings, such as reduced spending for special education and grade retention, as well as lower involvement in the child protection, welfare, and criminal justice systems; and second,
- Benefits may flow from greater economic productivity, higher earnings as adults.

The evidence is clear: high quality Pre-K programs are among the most cost-effective interventions with a long-term pay-off.