

## thread Network

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### Interior/Northern Alaska

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# thread



Investment in quality early care & learning leads to a more capable, productive, and valuable workforce.

## 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.

# thread

connecting early care & education to alaska

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# Quality Child Care Matters!

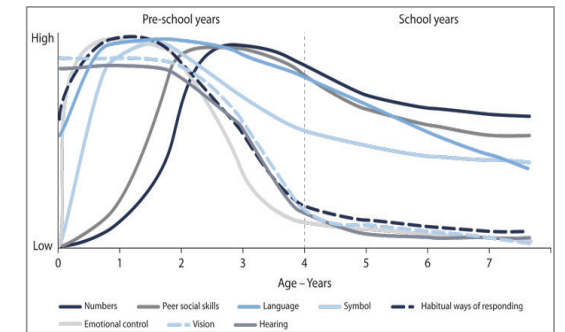
Every week in Alaska, nearly 90,000 children under age 13 are potentially in need of child care. Parents depend on child care in order to work while children need a safe setting that promotes their healthy development.

## A Child's Early Brain Development

Over the last 20 years much has been written about early brain science research. We know:

- 80 percent of a child's brain develops by age 3 and nearly 90 percent by age 5
- Early brain development may be enriched or impeded by environmental factors
- A child's early development is determined by daily experiences, not genetics alone

Simply put, early experiences determine whether a child's brain wiring will provide a strong or weak foundation for all future learning and behavior.



## Quality Child Care Settings Matter

On average, the children of working mothers spend about 36 hours a week in child care nationally. While parents are a child's first teacher, the quality of the child care setting also has a direct impact on child development given the time children spend in child care.

The research about the quality of child care shows strong evidence that 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, and increases economic growth for communities

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

## Promising Solutions

Learn & Grow, Alaska's Quality Improvement and Recognition System (QRIS), together with Alaska's System for Early Education (SEED), Retaining Our Outstanding Teachers (ROOTS), and Quality Initiatives create a system designed to offer all early care and learning programs an opportunity for continuous quality improvement.

## The Heckman Equation

Anyone looking for upstream solutions to the biggest problems facing America should look to Nobel Prize winning University of Chicago Economics Professor James Heckman's work to understand the great gains to be had by investing in the early and equal development of human potential.

**+** **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.

# Child Care in Alaska

## 2017 Policy Fact Sheet

Approximately 36,000 children under age 6 with working parents are in some type of child care setting — making it possible for 48,900 Alaskans to participate in the labor force. Parents depend on child care in order to work while children need a safe setting that promotes their healthy development.

### The Availability of Child Care Helps Strengthen the Economy

The reality is that working parents with young children depend on child care. The most recent data for Alaska shows for children under age 6<sup>1</sup>:

- 20,636 children live in two-parent families where both parents work.
- 15,345 children live in a single-parent family where the parent is in the labor force.

### Challenges Parents Have with Child Care

The availability, affordability, and quality of child care are challenges that working parents face throughout Alaska.

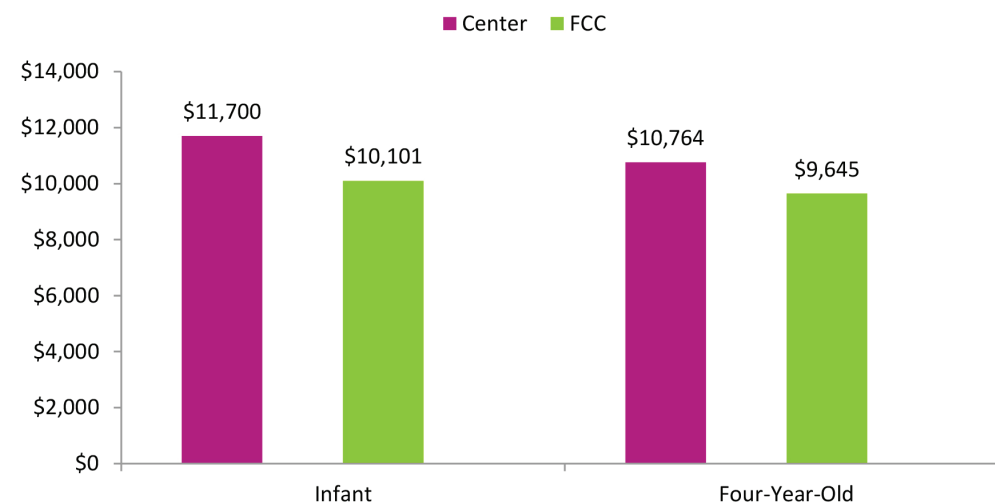
For many parents, it's simply hard to find child care. **thread**, Alaska's statewide child care resource and referral network, helps thousands of families every year find quality child care in their communities.

**Many families report difficulty affording child care.** Alaska is one of 19 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 7 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!<sup>2</sup>

- The average annual cost of center-based infant care in Alaska is \$11,700.
- The average annual cost of center-based preschool-age care is \$10,764.
- The average annual cost for infant care in a family child care home is \$10,101.
- The average annual cost for preschool-age care in a family child care home is \$9,645.<sup>1</sup>

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

### COST OF INFANT AND PRE-SCHOOL CARE



**Some financial assistance is available, but not enough.** About 12,000 children under age 6 in Alaska live in low-income working families. Another 26,000 children younger than age 13 in Alaska live in low-income families.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, on average, about 3,700 children each month receive a subsidy for their families to help make the cost of child care more affordable.

The most recent publicly available data (FY2014) shows that in Alaska:<sup>4</sup>

- 59 percent of the children receiving a monthly subsidy are under age 5.
- 41 percent of the children receiving a monthly subsidy are school age — between the ages of 5 and 12.

**The quality of care is also a concern to parents.** Alaska is developing a Quality Recognition and Improvement System (QRIS) called Learn & Grow for child care so that parents can more easily differentiate the quality of care among various settings.

The research about the quality of child care shows strong evidence that quality settings are related to healthy child development and school readiness. For example, quality child care is related not only to the safety of children in child care, but also to the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive growth of children. Studies show quality child care improves a child's school readiness and ultimate school performance, which leads to fewer grade retentions, fewer referrals to special education, and fewer high school drop outs.

### The Connection Between Quality Child Care and School Success

The 2015 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 41 other states.<sup>5</sup>

- 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.

Studies show that a high school graduate earns \$569,000 more over a lifetime than a student who does not complete high school.<sup>6</sup> In Alaska, the percentage of students who do not graduate on time (or drop out) is about 21 percent (2,678 students). About 7,000 children age 6-17 repeat a grade between kindergarten and high school.

### Child Care is an Economic Development Strategy

Child care is critical for working families, and working families fuel Alaska's economy. However, child care is also an investment in our children, which will lead to a stronger workforce in the future.

<sup>1</sup> State Child Care Facts in the State of Alaska (2016). Child Care Aware of America. <http://usa.childcareaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Alaska.pdf>  
<sup>2</sup> Parents and the High Cost of Child Care (2015). Child Care Aware of America. <http://usa.childcareaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Parents-and-the-High-Cost-of-Child-Care-2015-FINAL.pdf>  
<sup>3</sup> Low Income Working Families, Annie Casey Kids Count Data Center, Alaska, <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data#AK/2/0/char/0>  
<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Care, FY2014 Preliminary CCDF Data. <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/occ/resource/ccdf-statistics>  
<sup>5</sup> National Assessment for Educational Progress (2015). 4th Grade Test Score Results for Alaska. <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/states/>  
<sup>6</sup> Anthony Carnevale, Nicole Smith, Jeff Strick, "Help Wanted: Projects of Jobs and Education Requirements through 2018" Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, June 2010. <http://cew.georgetown.edu/jobs2018/>



### 2017 thread Policy Recommendations

1. INVEST in professional development and wage incentives for early educators.
2. INVEST in Alaska's quality improvement system, Learn & Grow.
3. INCREASE Child Care Assistance rates to align with current market rates.
4. MAINTAIN overall state investments in Head Start and Pre-K programs.
5. INCREASE awareness of the Alaska Early Learning Guidelines (ELGs) by coordinating efforts (public and private) to include the "universal" early care & learning workforce (parents, extended family, community).