

Early Childhood Conversation

Association of Alaska School Boards Spring Academy

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Sponsored by the Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB) with funding from the Preschool Development Grant B-5 from the AK Dept of Education and Early Development (DEED)

Our Agreements

- In every chair, a leader.
- Speak to be understood, listen to understand.
- Be present, be engaged.
- Value our time together.
- Challenges → Solutions
- Takest thou hats off.
- We are responsible for our experiences.
- This is a safe space for meaningful conversation.



This was an opportunity for school board members and superintendents from around the state to collaborate to identify early childhood care and learning needs to help AASB put together the picture of early childhood from birth to five in Alaska. AASB is coordinating the creation of a statewide needs assessment and strategic plan for DEED in order to streamline early care and learning systems and improve access to high quality affordable programs especially for low income, rural, and disadvantaged families.

Feedback from participants will help shape AASB's work, fill in gaps, provide a context and an understanding for how well it is going for young children in school districts around the state, and point to what is needed.

OVERARCHING QUESTION

What kinds of early care and learning will best prepare young children for school and life?

Current early care and learning programs in Alaska are:

- Licensed child care centers
- Licensed family child care centers
- Private preschools
- Homeschools
- School district pre-elementary

- Military child care
- Tribal child care
- Early Head Start
- Head Start
- Early Intervention/Infant Learning
- In-home visiting
- Library story time
- Imagination Library

Participants said we should add:

- FIT (Family Infant Toddler Program)
- Stand-alone SpED programs
- Sunday schools

QUESTION #1

What early care and learning programs or initiatives are working/not working well for families wanting services?

Working Well:

- Effective high-quality teachers with ability to build relationships
- Programs of good quality
- Infant learning/early learning preschools
- Parents as Teachers. Love + logic/PAT
- Head Start, but it's limited due to income guidelines
- Partnering with private care provider for equality
- Cultural relevance
- Identification of special needs (Child Find)
- Book bags/Imagination Library with a home visitor
- Funding/if available
- All-day kindergarten (Northstar)
- Immersion pre-school (Hydaburg)
- Community-based story times
- Nice mix of school and non-school based programs (Cordova)
- Baby Raven Reads
- Cuba model. Shared responsibility (wrap around)
- Home visits
- Playgroups

Not Working Well/Challenge:

- Income threshold for Head Start
- Accessibility, not enough slots, not affordable
- Transportation
- Inconsistent funding
- Defining high quality programs (need criteria)
- Fragmented programs, definitions
- 70% have not achieved 8 ADP
- Partnering with private care provider for equality
- Cultural relevance
- Lack of home visits
- Mentor networks peer-to-peer
- Identification of special needs (Child Find)
- Child care for parents before preschool (for infants and toddlers)
- State requirements for child care
- Limitations separating haves and have nots (IEP, tribe, income)
- Huge needs – more programs needed
- Domestic violence, child abuse, opioids, addiction
- Support and knowledge for families
- Finding volunteers for Baby Raven reads/storytelling
- Having activities during working hours
- Foster care, too much movement
- Settings that are comfortable where there are people
- Professional development for child care workers

QUESTION #2

What is needed for children to move from early care to preschool to school?

NOTE: Number of asterisks equals the number of additional times this response was given.*

- Parent presence in schools *
- “Practicing” school
- Wholistic – whole child
- Medical – parent packets at birth.
- Parenting – family & me events, workplace supports
- Smooth transitions, connections*
- Need open, universal preschool*
- Don't label kids to get them into programs
- Funding
- Look at education as preK-12 not K-12.
- Early childhood education for parents**
- Activities with parents – school and parent engagement*
- Clear expectations, learning objectives
- Educate public about importance of early education
- Reading material print and learning tools in homes. Enrichment resources.

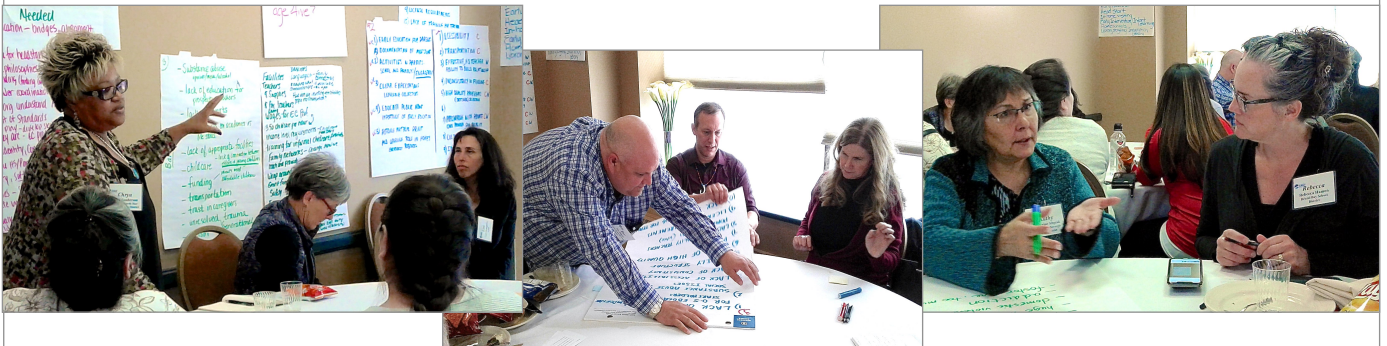
- Communication – bridges, alignment of skills
- Develop – philosophies of providers, programs, understanding (finding compatibility, overlap)**
- Stakeholder coordination, community conversation
- Parents and organizations understand ADP
- Alignment of standards***
- Time to play, play groups, develop skills through play*
- Who they are – EC programs linked to culture, identity, connection
- More time for coordination – Head Start and parents, school and early childhood coordinators*
- Creativity, soft skills, life skills
- Supplies, so we don't have to fundraise, dedicate more time to priority activities

QUESTION #3

What are the most serious barriers in your district to young children's care and learning from birth to age five?

NOTE: Number of asterisks equals the number of additional times this response was given.*

- Teachers*
- Supplies
- Living wages for EC professionals, \$3.50 child care per hour*
- Income level requirements for child care, Head Start
- Family networks – change how we reach and provide*
- Wrap-around services – coordination
- Grant funding inconsistency
- Safety - physical, emotional, cultural safety
- Training for all providers and teachers**
- Lack of consistency of policy, practice, philosophy*
- Changes with administration – Alaska values
- Barriers for families to be here so they can participate, kids are kept away, need sense of belonging*
- Languages – family connection
- Knowing what is available – communications, EL app
- How are we inviting stakeholders/people into conversation?
- Lack of awareness/importance for 0-5 education with stakeholders
- Substance abuse and social issues*
- Lack of accessibility
- Costs of high-quality programs
- License requirements
- Lack of education for prospective mothers
- Lack of supports
- Over-emphasis on academics vs life skills
- Lack of appropriate facilities*
- Child care
- Lack of connection between elders and young children
- Funding – parents need affordable child care
- Transportation
- Trust in caregivers
- Unresolved generational trauma
- Racism



23 PARTICIPANTS

School District	School Board Members
Anchorage	Deena Mitchell
Bristol Bay	Rebecca Hamon, Bill Hill
Cordova City	Barbara Jewell, Sheryl Glasen, Alex Russin
Denali Borough	Nikki DeMers
Dillingham City	Emily Hulett
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Lake & Peninsula	Shannon Johnson-Nanalook, Stacy Hill
Lower Kuskokwim	R. Thor Williams
North Slope Borough	Kathy Ahgeak
Southeast Region	Kay Andrews
Southwest Region	Marie Paul
Yukon Koyukuk	Wilma David, Shirley Kruger, Kerry Boyd, Dian Gurtler

Facilitators

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