

A SUMMARY OF:

# Early Childhood Alaska: A Strategic Direction for 2020-2025

June 2020

Alaska's early childhood system strategic plan outlines a series of bold actions and improvements to benefit children, prenatal through age 8, their families, and communities by 2025 and establishes a ten-year vision for the early childhood system. The plan aims to provide children and families in all Alaska communities with equitable access to resources, quality affordable care and education, and every opportunity for them to succeed.



*"A paradigm shift is needed for society. We need to realize how important early childhood development is. It has long-term implications for everyone."*

- Anchorage Parent

## North Star Ten-Year Vision

*Alaska children and families thrive in a strong and equitable early childhood system.*

**GOAL 1** Alaska children and families are healthy, safe, and stable.









**GOAL 2** Alaska children have quality early learning experiences and are prepared for success in school.

**GOAL 3** Alaska children and families are supported by a functional, comprehensive, mixed-delivery early childhood system.



The complete strategic plan, sources and appendices are available at [www.earlychildhoodalaska.com](http://www.earlychildhoodalaska.com)

# A Plan Shaped by Alaskans Statewide

|   |            |  |
|---|------------|--|
|  | <b>540</b> | Alaskans provided input                          |
|  | <b>3</b>   | Community gatherings                             |
|  | <b>3</b>   | Joint Task Force workgroups                      |
|  | <b>2</b>   | Statewide video conferences with 19 participants |
|  | <b>6</b>   | Joint Task Force meetings                        |
|  | <b>63</b>  | Early childhood professionals in 11 sessions.    |
|  | <b>301</b> | Online Stakeholder Survey respondents            |
|  | <b>50+</b> | JTF Leadership Team meetings                     |

## Alaskans from the following communities participated:

|               |                    |                  |                 |
|---------------|--------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Akhiok        | Holy Cross         | Mat-Su           | Port Graham     |
| Anchorage     | Homer              | McGrath          | Port Lions      |
| Atmautluak    | Hooper Bay         | Meadow Lakes     | Russian Mission |
| Bethel        | Houston            | Metlakatla       | Salcha          |
| Big Lake      | Huslia             | Minto            | Scammon Bay     |
| Chugiak       | Hydaburg           | Mountain Village | Sitka           |
| Coffman Cove  | Kaltag             | Napakiak         | Skagway         |
| Craig         | Kasaan             | Naukati          | Soldotna        |
| Dillingham    | Kasilof            | Nenana           | St. Paul        |
| Eagle River   | Ketchikan          | Newhalen         | Sterling        |
| Eek           | Kiana              | Nightmute        | Talkeetna       |
| Eureka        | King Salmon        | Nikiski          | Tetlin          |
| Fairbanks     | Kipnuk             | North Pole       | Tok             |
| Ft. Wainright | Klawock            | Northway         | Utqiagvik       |
| Galena        | Kodiak             | Nulato           | Wasilla         |
| Grayling      | Kotzebue           | Old Harbor       | Whittier        |
| Healy         | Kwethluk           | Palmer           | Willow          |
| Hollis        | Manley Hot Springs | Petersburg       | Wrangell        |

## Stakeholder Engagement Themes:

- ▶ Strong & resilient families
- ▶ Strong & resilient communities
- ▶ Basic needs
- ▶ Culture & tradition
- ▶ Access to quality care & education
- ▶ Affordability
- ▶ Workforce requirements
- ▶ Training
- ▶ Transportation
- ▶ Facilities
- ▶ Licensing & regulations
- ▶ Governmental coordination & alignment
- ▶ Local capacity building
- ▶ Collaboration & partnerships



# Creating Alaska's Early Childhood Plan

## Guiding Principles



Whole Child and Family Focus  
Committed to Equality  
Inclusive, Honoring, and Respectful  
Research Informed  
Cultivating System Change

### Statewide Needs Assessment

The strategic plan is built on **A Needs Assessment of Alaska's Mixed-Delivery System of Early Childhood Care and Education**, Dec. 2019 which compiled and analyzed data about the system, Alaska's children, and what their families, caregivers and educators need.

### Alignment with Existing Statewide Plans

The plan also builds on existing statewide plans in order to coordinate with and support these efforts to advance the early childhood system in Alaska.

### Alaska Early Childhood Joint Task Force (JTF) Meetings, Surveys, and Workgroups

An eight member Leadership Team guided a 40+ member JTF advisory group and provided important direction throughout the strategic planning process.

### Stakeholder Engagement

During 2019 and 2020, face-to-face and virtual meetings were held throughout the state with hundreds of parents, families, community members, and early childhood professionals.



# PLAN OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

## Strong and Resilient Families and Communities

- Build social connections and positive family relationships for emotional, educational and spiritual support.
- Increase the number of family and early childhood professional partnerships that use best practices in child development and parenting strategies to support physical, cognitive, social emotional and language development.
- Increase access to concrete supports in times of need for safe housing, food security, out-of-home placement, behavioral health treatment and equitable access to resources.
- Increase the social emotional well-being of children, their families and caregivers.

## Integrated Physical, Mental and Dental Health

- Increase the percentage of insured children and pregnant women.
- Increase the percentage of children having a medical home.
- Integrate primary care and behavioral health services.
- Increase access to early childhood mental health supports including family supports, therapies, consultation and reflective supervision services.

## Family Partnerships

- Families' opinions and ideas drive the design of system policies and programming.
- Early childhood programs meet the cultural and language needs of children and families.

## Accessibility

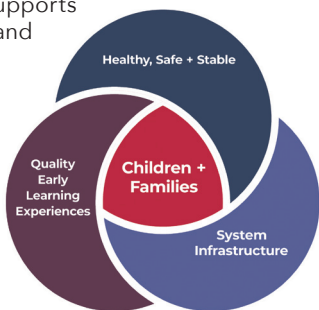
- Identify all programs that provide and support infant/early childhood education.
- Increase the awareness of early childhood education programs for more access for all stakeholders.
- Increase technical assistance opportunities from the state and partners to improve access to high quality early childhood education programs.
- Assess and address barriers to access including transportation, facility and physical space needs of programs.

## Affordability

- Decrease the amount of income families spend on child care and early childhood education.
- Adjust child care assistance eligibility requirements to ensure financial support for more families.

## High Quality

- Increase the number of early childhood education programs participating and advancing in Learn & Grow.
- Provide information and tools to families on how to assess the quality of early childhood programs.
- Increase access to high quality inclusive in-home or community based early childhood education programming.
- Provide supports to decrease suspensions and expulsions in early childhood programs.



**Plan Framework**

# PLAN OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES



## Transitions

- Establish procedures and practices for collaboration and communication between early education programs and kindergarten that support all domains.
- Establish procedures and practices, in partnership with families, to develop transition plans for all children who move within a program or to a different program.
- Provide information to parents about transition points and best practices.

## Elevation of the Early Childhood System

- Partner with families and local communities in all planning and decision-making on system change.
- Develop and implement marketing strategies to increase public awareness of the importance of early childhood.
- Develop and implement a statewide public policy agenda.

## Strategic Funding

- Develop fiscal policy that moves system sectors toward delivering services in a whole-child approach.
- Provide financial incentives for ongoing quality and system improvement.
- Identify new and strategic ways to maximize funding.

## Data Integration and Accountability

- Map and analyze current early childhood data systems in Alaska.
- Regularly review, update, and use data to guide continuous improvement and inform planning, policy, and practice.

## Workforce

- Increase cross sector recruitment and retention of early childhood professionals.
- Increase professional development opportunities for early childhood professionals.
- Improve wages and compensation for early childhood professionals.
- Increase diversity across the early childhood workforce.

## Coordinated Plan Implementation

- Ensure coordination to develop aligned policies, standards, and regulations across all sectors and settings.
- Create an improved, sustainable and accountable governance approach with decision-making authority.
- Establish roles and responsibilities for both current and improved governance approaches to implement the strategic plan.

**See the 123 action steps called for and the full plan content at [www.earlychildhoodalaska.com](http://www.earlychildhoodalaska.com)**

# Moving Forward

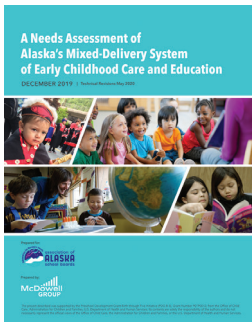
## Alaska's Early Childhood System Strengths

- ▶ Language and culture
- ▶ Family and community ties
- ▶ Nonprofit organizations
- ▶ Tribal governments
- ▶ Passionate advocates and educators
- ▶ Innovation in education



## Implementing the Plan

- ▶ Some activities of the plan have already begun through existing initiatives. The full plan is being recommended for adoption by Alaska's Early Childhood Coordinating Council (AECCC) in late 2020.
- ▶ A plan will be created to map and analyze current early childhood programs and services and make this information available to families and system professionals.
- ▶ Partnerships with families and local communities will be established to ensure their participation in all planning and decision-making related to system change.
- ▶ Procedures and practices for collaboration and communication called for in the plan will be established. Achieving the goals of the plan will require all sectors of Alaska's early childhood system working together with businesses, policy makers, tribes and community leaders.



Alaska's early childhood strategic plan was based on findings and considerations from **A Needs Assessment of Alaska's Mixed-Delivery System of Early Childhood Care and Education**, Dec. 2019 which is available at **[www.earlychildhoodalaska.com](http://www.earlychildhoodalaska.com)**



The strategic plan was supported by a Preschool Development Grant (PDG B-5) awarded to the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development in partnership with the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Grant Number 90TP0012 from the Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Office of Child Care, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.