OVERVIEW

WHAT’S NEW
During the 2017-2018 school year, state legislature approved an additional $6 million for Alaska Pre-Elementary programs for the next two years (2018-2020). Additionally, the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development was awarded a Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five award in 2018 for $2.6 million to conduct a statewide needs assessment and a strategic plan that maximizes parental choice. The state also plans to share best practice by revising the 2009 Early Learning Guidelines; expanding provider trainings and coaching activities; developing a trauma-informed module; creating an Alaska version of Strengthening Families training; offering rural author mini-grants; and expediting fingerprint background check process.

BACKGROUND
Since the 1980s, Alaska has supplemented federal funding for Head Start programs in an effort to enhance school readiness and professional development, and expand opportunities for children and families. In 2009-2010, the state launched the Alaska Pre-Kindergarten pilot program, now known as the Alaska Pre-Elementary program. During the 2017-2018 school year, the program was open to preschool-age children in 11 of the 54 school districts statewide. Alaska has offered a supplement to federally recognized Head Start programs since the 1980s. During the 2017-2018 program year, the state provided $6.8 million to support Head Start programs in Alaska. The financial support is part of an effort to develop program quality through school readiness activities and professional improvement. The funds also offer admission to additional children and families whenever possible.

In 2015, the state changed the way competitive grants are offered to include two types of grantees. Districts new to the program may apply for a 3-year pre-elementary development grant geared toward strategic planning to begin implementing or supporting existing Pre-Elementary goals. Previously funded grantees may apply for three-year renewal grants to support the program while the districts worked towards sustainability of the program once the state grant funding ends. Development grants are geared toward strategic planning to begin implementing or support existing Pre-Elementary goals until they can be switched to renewal grants.

Budget reductions have continued to be a challenge, as inconsistent funding has affected program implementation and quality. Alaska receives no federal funding for the Pre-Elementary program, though some districts utilize Title IA or Title IC funding for preschool. Funding for the Alaska Pre-Elementary program goes directly to school districts or Head Start agencies. Participating programs may subcontract with public schools, Head Start programs, or private agencies.

The Teaching Strategies assessment was piloted by the state during the 2011-2012 school year. State policy requires all programs to use this tool multiple times throughout the year. In addition to classroom quality observations, Education Northwest is planning to conduct a formal assessment of the programs using the 3-year Developmental grants.
**ALASKA PRE-ELEMENTARY**

**ACCESS**

Total state pre-K enrollment .......................................................... 315
School districts that offer state program ........................................... 20%
Income requirement ................................................................. No income requirement
Minimum hours of operation ......................................................... Determined locally
Operating schedule ................................................................. Determined locally
Special education enrollment, ages 3 and 4 ............................. 1,317
Federally funded Head Start enrollment, ages 3 and 4 .......... 2,365
State-funded Head Start enrollment, ages 3 and 4 ............... 142

**QUALITY STANDARDS CHECKLIST**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POLICY</th>
<th>AK PRE-K REQUIREMENT</th>
<th>BENCHMARK</th>
<th>REQUIREMENT MEETS BENCHMARK?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early learning &amp; development standards</td>
<td>Comprehensive, aligned, supported, culturally sensitive</td>
<td>Comprehensive, aligned, supported, culturally sensitive</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum supports</td>
<td>Approval process &amp; supports</td>
<td>Approval process &amp; supports</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher degree</td>
<td>BA (public); None (nonpublic)</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher specialized training</td>
<td>ECE, Elem. Ed., ECE SpEd (public); None (nonpublic)</td>
<td>Specializing in pre-K</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant teacher degree</td>
<td>CDA</td>
<td>CDA or equivalent</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff professional development</td>
<td>6 credit hours/5 years (teachers only); PD plans; Voluntary coaching</td>
<td>For teachers &amp; assistants: At least 15 hours/year; individual PD plans; coaching</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum class size</td>
<td>Determined locally</td>
<td>20 or lower</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff-child ratio</td>
<td>Determined locally</td>
<td>1:10 or better</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screening &amp; referral</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Vision, hearing &amp; health screenings; &amp; referral</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous quality improvement system</td>
<td>Structured classroom observations determined locally; Data used for program improvement at local level only</td>
<td>Structured classroom observations; data used for program improvement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For more information about the benchmarks, see the Executive Summary and Roadmap to State Profile Pages.

**RESOURCES**

Total state pre-K spending .................................................. $3,200,000
Local match required? ....................................................... No
State Head Start spending .................................................... $6,852,991
State spending per child enrolled ....................................... $10,159
All reported spending per child enrolled* .................................. $10,159

* Pre-K programs may receive additional funds from federal or local sources that are not included in this figure.

**SPENDING PER CHILD ENROLLED**

![Graph showing spending per child enrolled for different categories]