

Project Title: PreKB-5 Grant- Alaska's Early Childhood Education Systemic Plan for the Future

Applicant Name: State of Alaska, Department of Education and Early Development

Contact Numbers: (907) 465-8707 *phone* and (907) 465-4156 *fax*

Email Address: supanika.ackerman@alaska.gov **Website Address:** <https://education.alaska.gov>

Project Summary/Abstract: Alaska has urban, rural, and remote communities—many of which are not connected by a road and are accessible only by small plane. These communities tend to have higher percentages of families living in poverty and often English is not the primary language spoken at home. Public schools do serve many of these communities (if 10 or more students are present) but kindergarten is not mandatory, and Alaska does not have a definition of kindergarten readiness. The Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) uses the Alaska Developmental Profile (ADP) tool to assess whether children are ready to enter kindergarten or 1st grade and the most recent data shows that only 31% transition into elementary school ready. Similarly, Alaska was just ranked last in National 4th grade reading scores.

Research shows children that have access to high-quality Early Childhood Care and Education (ECE) programs are more successful in school and life. Unsurprisingly, given the lack of population density and remoteness, it is in rural communities that the early childhood education system is less robust in Alaska, with few or no options for parents. The Alaska Preschool Development Grant Application proposes a multi-faceted plan for continued development of a comprehensive, integrated, and sustainable ECE system. Our vision is that Alaska has a birth through five ECE system offering all families services that maximize parental choice, are culturally inclusive, promote optimal development, and prepare children for school and life.

The *target population* is low income or rural children under age six. These children are at a disadvantage due to the lack of ECE services available to them. To determine which communities, have higher concentrations of low-income and disadvantaged children, Alaska will use data from DEED on K-12 student eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch (a commonly used proxy for socioeconomic disadvantage). Our short- and intermediate-term outcomes are to increase parent knowledge and maximize ECE choices, improve child transitions into school, increase the quality and availability of ECE programs, improve teacher preparation and retention, and have more unified system of programs and data. Long-term outcomes are that more low-income or rural children arrive at school ready for success and more students are proficient by third grade reading.

Alaska will accomplish these outcomes by embarking on a year-long project that begins with a comprehensive needs assessment, which will then feed into a robust statewide strategic planning process. Both of these critical activities will address the identified needs of families and will focus on aligning expectations and language among parents, ECE programs, and elementary schools. In addition parent knowledge will be expanded about ECE options, share best practices across ECE programs, and invest in our system-wide quality initiatives to ensure that Alaska's most vulnerable children are given the opportunity to be successful.