

Alaska Department of Education and Early Development

Early Learning Report



February 21, 2025

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Early Learning Education Funding Overview

The Early Learning programs consist of two components: Early Learning Coordination and Pre-Kindergarten Grants.

The Early Learning Coordination component includes both federal and state general funds. The Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) receives a federal grant that funds the Head Start Collaboration Office. This five-year grant, totaling \$130.0 comes directly from the U.S. Office of Head Start (OHS). These funds support the Head Start Liaison's salary and state activities that assist Head Start programs. Additionally, unrestricted general funds cover the non-federal match grants for Head Start, as well as grants for Best Beginnings, Parents as Teachers, and Thread.

The Pre-Kindergarten Grants component is funded through state general funds and supports two grant programs: Pre-Elementary Grants and the Alaska Reads Act Early Education Grant Program.

The Early Learning team comprises four employees: one Education Administrator 2 and three Education Specialists. Each Education Specialist manages specific programs within the Early Learning team, including a Head Start Program Liaison overseeing the Head Start Collaboration Office, Preschool Special Education, and programs related to the Alaska Reads Act.

Education Specialists provide professional development both online and in person at conferences to help programs comply with state-mandated Pre-Elementary regulations. These regulations include the annual approval to operate application and assessing children's progress across all developmental domains outlined in the Alaska Early Learning Guidelines. The Education Specialists also offer training and support for the state-approved assessment tool, Teaching Strategies GOLD, and the state-supported screening tool, Ages & Stages Questionnaire.

Early Learning Coordination

Early Learning Coordination is made up of the following components:

Grant	Funding Amount in Whole Dollars
<p>Head Start and Early Head Start All federally funded Head Start programs in Alaska currently receive state grant funds to help fulfil their 20 percent non-federal share requirement. The annual state grant award is a straight percentage based upon each program’s federal award. For FY2025, this would have been 19 percent. NOTE: In FY2024, each Head Start program received a Cost-of-Living Allowance, therefore this percentage is valid for the FY2025 award only.</p>	\$13,038,500
<p>Parents as Teachers Parents as Teachers is a collaboration with the Department of Health & Social Services Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program that provides support for early learners (birth to five) by empowering caregivers through personal and group visits. Grants are awarded through a competitive application process.</p>	\$474,700
<p>Best Beginnings Best Beginnings is a public-private partnership that mobilizes people and resources to ensure all Alaska children begin school ready to succeed.</p>	\$320,000
<p>Thread Thread houses Learn and Grow, the state’s quality recognition and improvement system (QRIS) and provides early childhood specific professional development opportunities for early childhood professionals across the state.</p>	\$300,000

Pre-Kindergarten Grants

Pre-Kindergarten Grants component provides the following grants:

Grant	Funding Amount in Whole Dollars
<p>Pre-Kindergarten Grants Pre-kindergarten grants support voluntary, comprehensive, school district-based preschool programs for three-, four- and five-year old children that are based on the guiding principles and goals set forth in the Alaska Early Learning Guidelines.</p>	\$3,200,000
<p>Early Education Program Grants (Alaska Reads Act Grants) Early Education Program Grants support the development or improvement of school district-based early education programs for four- and five-year-old children with the goal of meeting the Alaska Early Education Program Standards at the end of the three-year grant cycle.</p>	\$2,999,900

Early Learning Component Program Details

Head Start Grants

Head Start is a federal program that supports the school readiness of children from birth to age five in low-income families by promoting comprehensive child development services, including health, nutrition, and parental involvement. Head Start programs receive 80% of their funding from federal sources and must provide a 20% non-federal match.

Since 2001, the State of Alaska has contributed state funding through the Department of Education and Early Development to help meet this non-federal match requirement. In 2024, the legislature formalized this commitment by amending AS 14.38.010, stating:

"The Department shall make a grant to each eligible Head Start agency operating a Head Start program in the state under 42 U.S.C. 9831-9852c in an amount equal to the amount of the Head Start program's non-federal contributions required under 42 U.S.C. 9835. If the amount appropriated to the department is insufficient to meet the authorized grant amounts under this subsection, the department shall distribute the grants on a pro-rata basis to each eligible Head Start agency."

In addition to state funding, Head Start programs can fulfill their non-federal share requirement through in-kind contributions, other local funding sources, or by requesting a waiver.

Under the state funding formula, all Alaska Head Start programs receive the same percentage of their previous federal fiscal year funding allocation. This formula ensures equitable distribution of funds across all 17 Head Start programs, regardless of size, location, or program model (e.g., center-based, home-based, part-time, or full-day).

Head Start Funding Table in Whole Dollars

*Please note that the federal funding listed here is from Federal FY23 and does not include "one-time funding" such as for capital projects

	Funded Enrollment	Staff Employed	Communities Served	FY2023 Federal Grant Allocation*	FY2025 State Grant Allocation
Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association	65	22	3	\$1,660,141	\$314,93
Association of Village Council Presidents	183	44	10	\$3,095,092	\$585,580
Bristol Bay Native Association	80	24	4	\$1,766,039	\$334,128
CCS Early Learning	252	145	3	\$6,046,650	\$1,144,004
Central Council Tlingit & Haida	262	55	10	\$4,291,687	\$811,971
Chugachmiut Head Start	22	11	2	\$908,881	\$105,700
Cook Inlet Native Head Start	259	81	1 (Anchorage)	\$5,851,526	\$1,107,087
Cook Inlet Tribal Council	72	35	1 (Anchorage)	\$2,251,251	\$425,928
Council of Athabascan Tribal Governance	30	10	5	\$655,685	\$124,053
Fairbanks Native Association	303	74	1 (Fairbanks)	6,000,536	\$1,135,279
Kawerak	238	111	11	\$5,333,112	\$1,009,005
Kenaitze Indian Tribe	105	39	1	\$2,511,950	\$475,252
Kids' Corp Inc	257	120	1 (Anchorage)	\$5,193,836	\$982,655
Metlakatla	71	28	1	\$1,985,433	\$375,637
Tanana Chiefs Conference	180	63	12	\$3,296,871	\$623,756
ThrivAlaska	165	44	1 (Fairbanks)	\$2,127,823	\$402,576
RurAL CAP Head Start	656	196	22	\$9,572,973	\$1,047,124
Totals	3,141	1,104	99	\$62,554,071	\$13,38,500

Parents as Teachers

The Parents as Teachers (PAT) program provides home-based services to children and their parents or caregivers during the early years of child development. PAT equips parents and caregivers with research-based information on child growth and development, activities and toys that promote learning, positive discipline strategies, problem-solving techniques, realistic expectations of child behavior, and approaches that foster children's self-esteem.

The PAT philosophy is based on the following principles:

- Parents are their children’s first and most influential teachers.
- The early years of a child’s life are critical for optimal development and lay the foundation for future success in school and life.
- Parent education and family support programs should be grounded in established and emerging research.
- All young children and their families deserve equal opportunities to succeed, regardless of demographic, geographic, or economic factors.
- Understanding and appreciating diverse cultural histories and traditions is essential to effectively serving families.

In April 2023, a request for applications was published for a new three-year grant cycle, running from July 1, 2023, to June 30, 2026. A total of nine applications were submitted and reviewed by a multidisciplinary team of three professionals from the Department of Health, Department of Family and Community Services, and the Department of Education and Early Development.

Parents as Teachers Awards in Whole Dollars

Grantee	Locations	Children Served July 1, 2024 – September 30, 2024	State Award
Kodiak Area Native Association (KANA)	Kodiak	23	\$30,000
Kid’s Corps	Anchorage	21	\$60,101
RurAL CAP	Haines, Mt. Village, Toksook	27	\$145,000
SEA-AEYC	Juneau	71	\$197,000
Department of Health	Anchorage Office		\$42,599
Total:		142	\$474,700

Since FY2018, the Department of Health, Public Health Division has provided assistance and support to the PAT program through a reimbursable services agreement with DEED.

Best Beginnings

Best Beginnings' mission is to mobilize people and resources to ensure that all Alaska children enter school ready to succeed. Through a partnership with Department of Education and Early Development, Best Beginnings carries out activities outlined in Sec. 14.03.072 – Early Literacy Information, which states:

"In partnership with local media outlets, the department shall create and implement a communications campaign to educate parents and guardians about the importance of early literacy. The campaign shall include an internet website that provides access to current research on early literacy, book recommendations, and vocabulary-building exercises."

Best Beginnings uses state funds to staff its program and provide young children with access to books through 29 Imagination Libraries, serving 138 Alaskan communities. Alaska has an estimated 53,996 children under the age of five, and 32 of them are enrolled in Imagination Library, receiving a free book in the mail each month.

Thread

Thread oversees Learn and Grow, the state's Quality Recognition and Improvement System (QRIS), which certifies the quality level of early childhood programs. This system also supports school districts and Head Start programs in enhancing the quality of their early childhood education services. The Department of Education and Early Development funds help support school districts and Head Start programs that choose to enroll in Learn & Grow.

Currently, 16 school districts and three Head Start programs are actively participating in Learn & Grow. Participation includes professional development for administrators and classroom teachers through cohort meetings, training, and early childhood coaching.

Learn & Grow provides the training and framework for districts to implement the Pyramid Model, an early childhood approach to Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). Additionally, Thread offers specialized professional development opportunities for early childhood professionals across the state.

Pre-Kindergarten Grants Component Program Details

Pre-Elementary Grants

FY2025 marks the second year of a three-year cohort for state Pre-Kindergarten grants. All Alaskan public-school districts were eligible to apply for the FY2024-2026 Alaska Pre-Elementary Grant (PEG) to plan, launch, or support existing programs that align with Alaska’s Pre-Elementary Goals.

The PEG program serves children aged three to five, as well as five-year-olds who either missed the kindergarten age cut-off or were identified as needing an additional year of preschool.

Through a competitive application process, 22 school districts applied for a PEG, and nine were awarded funding. The total allocation for FY2025 was \$3.2 million, with awards determined using a formula that included a base allocation and a per-student rate, based on projected enrollment figures provided in district applications.

Pre-Elementary Grant Awards in Whole Dollars

School District	FY2025 Number of Students*	FY2025 Number of Sites	FY2024 Allocations	FY2025 Allocations
Aleutians East Borough School District	15	2	\$302,648	\$247,920
Bristol Bay Borough School District	11	1	\$460,725	\$227,008
Chugach School District	60	4	\$188,000	\$262,624
Juneau Borough School District	60	3	\$730,294	\$495,840
Kodiak Island Borough School District	67	1	\$761,729	\$577,018
Lake & Peninsula Borough School District	27	6	\$59,507	\$556,345
Nome Public Schools	40	1	\$148,644	\$123,345
Southwest Region School District	66	8	\$605,294	\$495,840
Yukon-Koyukuk School District	8	7	\$261,313	\$214,060
Total	354	33	\$3,518,155	\$3,200,000

*Enrollment numbers based on data provided by district in DEED’s Grant Management System (GMS) in the first quarter of FY2025

Early Education Program Grants

Under the Alaska Reads Act, the Early Education Program (EEP) Grant provides funding to develop or improve district-wide early education programs for four- and five-year-old children. The grant supports districts in working toward meeting the Alaska Early Education Program Standards by the end of the three-year grant period, making them eligible for 0.5 Average Daily Membership (ADM) funding.

In spring 2023, eleven districts applied for the grant, and seven were awarded funds; these districts are operating on a FY2024–FY2026 grant cycle. In spring 2024, nine districts applied, and two were awarded funds; these districts are operating on a FY2025–FY2027 cycle. Recipients were selected through a competitive application process that required prior consultation with each local and tribal Head Start agency within the district’s boundaries and prioritized the lowest performing districts based on the System of School Support.

Allocations for each district were determined using a formula that considered the projected number of students per district, the total amount of available funding, funds necessary for program startup, and the amount requested during the application process. According to AS.03.410(b), the total allocation was \$2,999,900 for both FY2024 and FY2025, and the full amount is allocated to grantees annually.

Unless a district elects to apply for and become eligible for 0.5 ADM funding, no grant application will be released in spring 2025. A new grant application will be available in FY2026 to initiate the second three-year grant cycle.

Early Education Program Grants in Whole Dollars

School District	Number of Students	Number of Sites	FY2024 Allocation	FY2025 Allocation	Projected FY2026 Allocation
Alaska Gateway School District	12	3	N/A	\$150,000	\$150,000
Denali Borough School District	11	3	\$ 623,386	\$500,236	\$500,236
Galena City School District	19	1	\$ 348,365	\$313,864	\$313,864
Hydaburg City School District	8	1	\$ 186,663	\$152,163	\$152,163
Iditarod Area School District	16	6	\$ 568,857	\$499,986	\$499,986
Kake City School District	7	1	\$ 498,503	\$403,550	\$403,550
Kuspuk School District	33	3	\$ 495,326	\$312,082	\$312,082
Lower Kuskokwim School District	10	1	\$ 278,800	\$171,048	\$171,048
Northwest Arctic Borough School District	81	11	N/A	\$496,971	\$496,971
Total	197	30	\$2,999,900	\$2,999,900	\$2,999,900

Application for Early Education Program Approval and 0.5 ADM/Formula Funding

Over two cycles (FY2024 and FY2025), DEED has used the Early Education Program (EEP) Approval application and 0.5 ADM/Formula Funding to identify districts that demonstrate quality and meet eligibility criteria for receiving formula funding for four- and five-year-old students, as allocated through AS 14.17.500. To qualify, districts must have operated an early education program for at least

three years, consulted with every local and tribal Head Start agency within the district, successfully implemented the Alaska Early Education Program Standards, and employed early education teachers with current, required certifications.

In 2023, seven school districts submitted applications, and Anchorage School District received conditional approval due to the limited time available in that application cycle for implementing the Early Education Program Standards. Anchorage agreed to fully implement all Early Education Program Standards by May 2024.

In 2024, although seven districts requested applications, only four complete applications were submitted. Of these, two districts—Valdez and Skagway—received conditional approval because they documented having implemented half of the EEP Standards; both agreed to fully implement all standards by May 2025.

Anchorage School District achieved full approval within one year, and DEED anticipates that Valdez and Skagway will follow a similar timeline. Additionally, eight school districts have requested applications for FY2026. Based on current progress, it is anticipated that four districts will submit a complete application by the May 15, 2025, deadline.

Early Education Programs Eligible for .5 ADM in Whole Dollars

School District	Number of Students	FY2024 Allocation	FY2025 Allocation
Anchorage School District	546	\$1,693,599	\$1,945,128
Skagway School District	5	N/A	\$15,238
Valdez City School District	30	N/A	\$90,417

Alaska Pre-Elementary Program Goals and Activities

Goal 1	Promote school readiness on positive outcomes in all areas of child development addressed in the <i>Alaska Early Learning Guidelines</i> , build strong early childhood literacy by incorporating the appropriate areas of the <i>Alaska Literacy Blueprint</i> , and align with the goals of their districts.
Goal 2	Identify and provide support for Alaska’s children who are most in need of support.
Goal 3	Maximize parental choice and continuity of care, by encouraging community-based collaboration from a mixed delivery system of early learning support which includes, state, federally funded, private, and non-profit early learning environments.
Goal 4	Support the use of child reliable and valid assessment systems and tools to ensure programs are effectively measuring children’s progress across all the domains in the <i>Alaska Early Learning Guidelines</i> and using assessment information to inform practice and policy decisions.

Goal 5	Support the transition of pre-elementary children to kindergarten through partnership and strongschool and family relationships. Programs will build ongoing, long-lasting, trusting relationships with parents, including them in decision making concerning curriculum and other aspects of their child’s education and development.
Goal 6	Ensure that early childhood professionals have excellent preparation, ongoing professional development, and compensation commensurate with their qualifications and experience to provide the most effective teacher/child interactions.

Alaska Pre-Elementary Grant Outcome Measures

Child Pre-Elementary Growth During School Year 2023-2024

Head Start and school district grantees are required to use the same child development assessment. The Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) provides statewide access to the tool, Teaching Strategies GOLD®, along with professional development training. Additionally, school districts that are not grant-funded may opt to use the tool; data from these non-grant funded programs are included in the following data sets. In the 2023-2024 school year, licensed childcare programs enrolled in Alaska’s Quality Recognition & Improvement System also had access to this tool, although their data is not included in this graph.

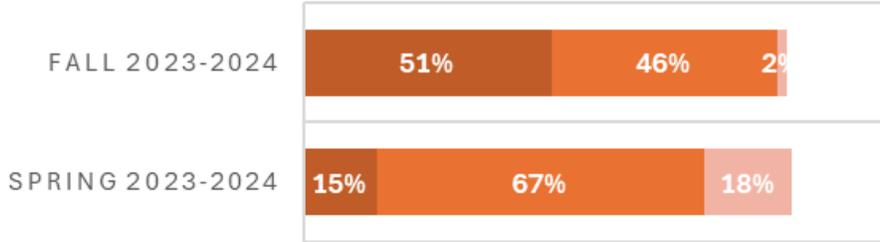
Teachers observe children based on the concept of Widely Held Expectations. In Teaching Strategies GOLD®, Widely Held Expectations refer to a set of criterion-referenced, research-based benchmarks that indicate the typical skills, knowledge, and behaviors for each grade or class. A student’s development is recorded as meeting, exceeding, or falling below these expectations. DEED requires pre-elementary grantees to submit data from five developmental areas: social-emotional, cognitive, language, literacy, and mathematics.

The following graphs display data from two checkpoint periods—Fall 2023 and Spring 2024. They represent three- and four-year-old students from school districts and Head Start programs. These graphs depict “Area-level” scores, which are aggregates of children’s scores based on 4–12 sub-skills, known as dimensions. For example, the Literacy Area is composed of the following dimensions:

- Notices and discriminates rhymes,
- Notices and discriminates alliteration,
- Notices and discriminates discrete units of sound,
- Applies phonics concepts and knowledge of word structure to decode text,
- Identifies and names letters,
- Identifies letter-sound correspondences,
- Uses and appreciates books and other texts,
- Uses print concepts,
- Interacts during reading experiences, book conversations, and text reflections,
- Uses emergent reading skills,
- Retells stories and recounts details from informational texts, and
- Writes name.

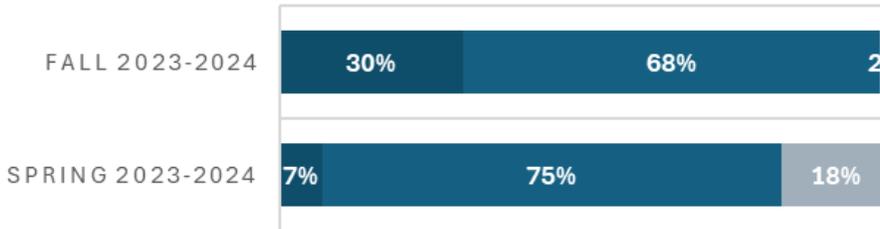
STATEWIDE SOCIAL EMOTIONAL

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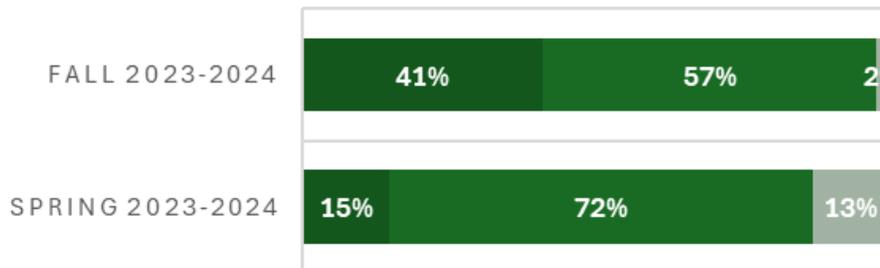
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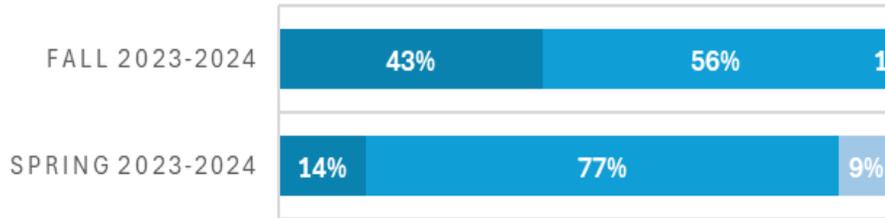
STATEWIDE LANGUAGE

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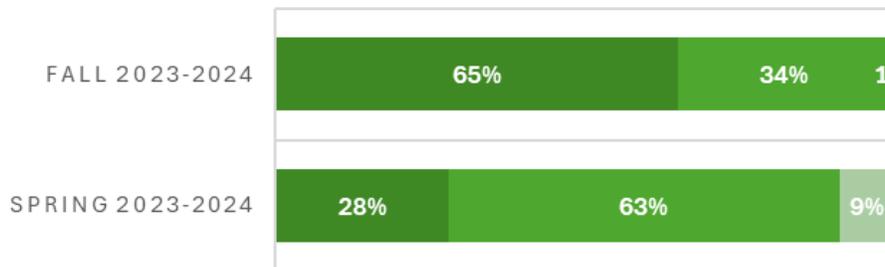
STATEWIDE COGNITIVE

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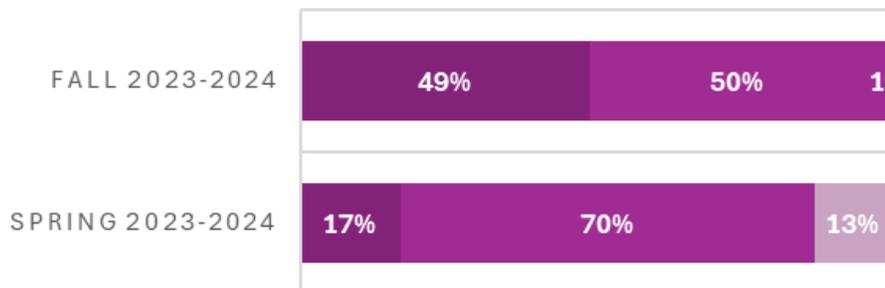
STATEWIDE MATHEMATICS

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STATEWIDE LITERACY

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Teaching Strategies GOLD® also tracks student growth. The starting Fall score for Literacy is taken by programs by November 30. This assessment reflects the children’s aggregate literacy scores after the first couple of months of instruction. Spring scores are due by June 1 at the end of the school year.

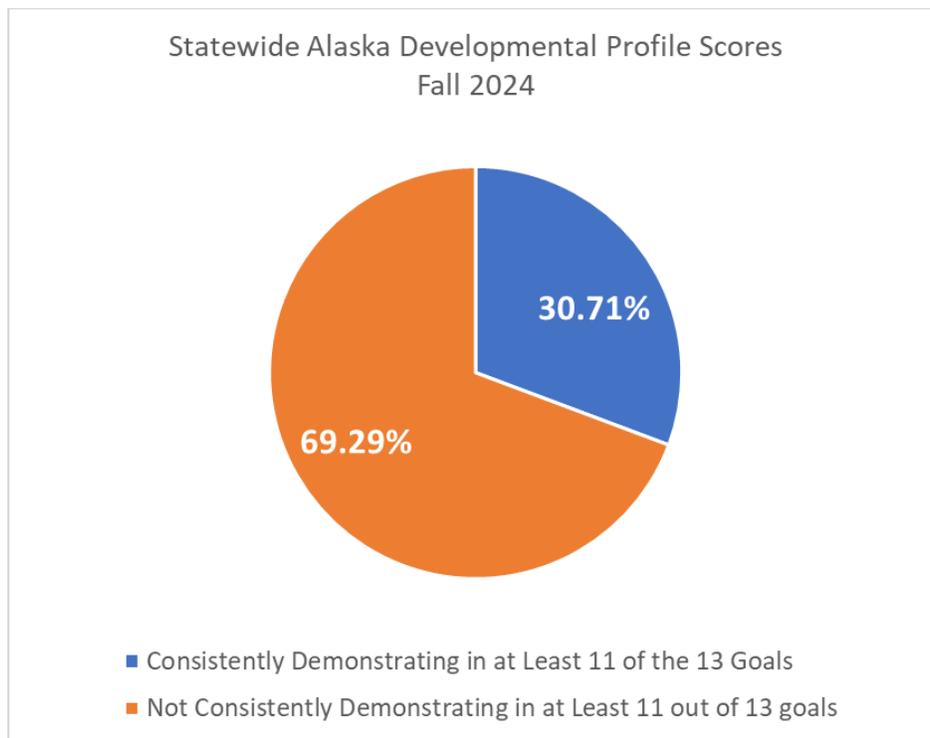
Alaska Developmental Profile (ADP)

The ADP is an observational tool administered by kindergarten teachers to all kindergarten students during the first four weeks of the school year. First-grade students who did not attend kindergarten were also assessed but are not represented in the data presented below. Teachers provide a rating for each student for 13 goals within five domain areas. There are three possible ratings:

- 0 = Student does not demonstrate the goal
- 1 = Student demonstrates the goal at least 50 percent of the time
- 2 = Student demonstrates the goal consistently at least 80 percent of the time

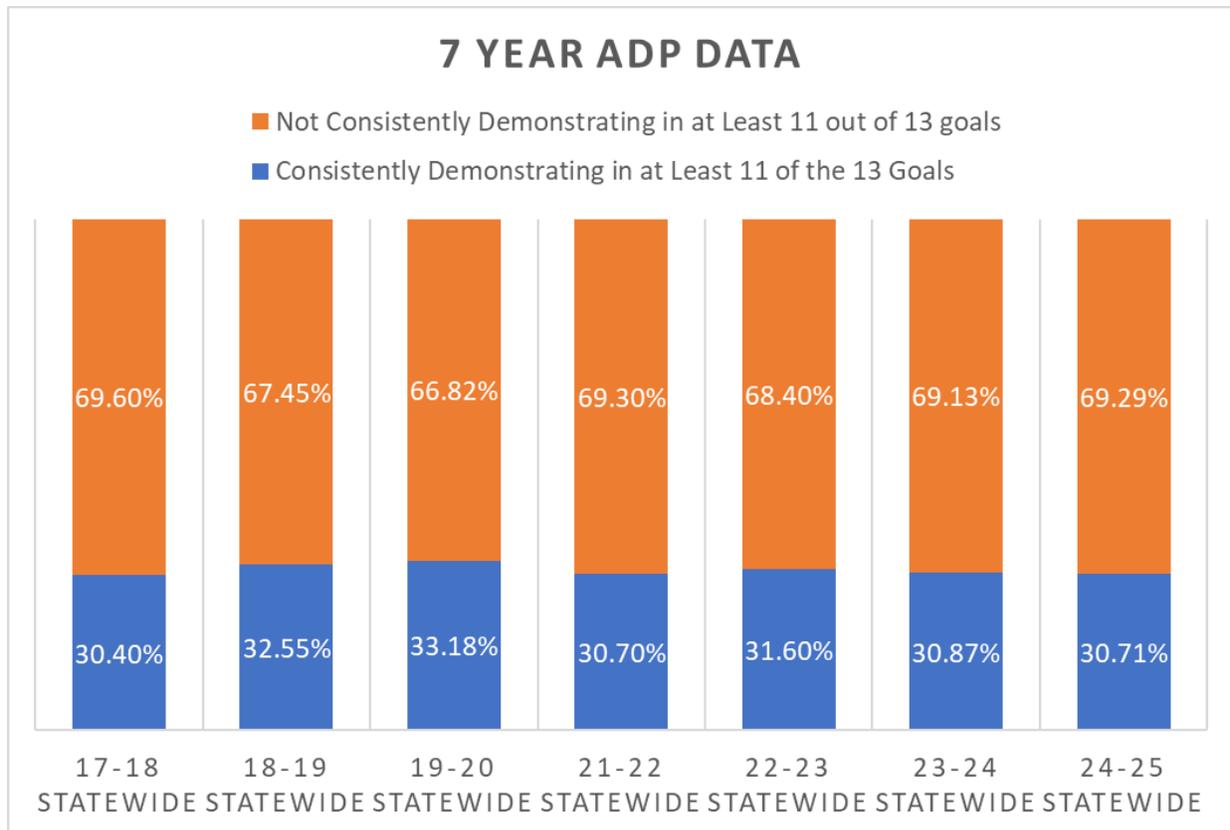
A student who receives a 2 on at least 11 out of 13 goals is determined to be demonstrating kindergarten readiness skills.

The following ADP data is from the Fall of 2024. During the Fall of 2024, 7,821 students were assessed with the Alaska Developmental Profile. Results show 30.71 percent of students assessed were demonstrating kindergarten readiness skills while 69.29 percent were not able to consistently demonstrate them upon kindergarten entry.



Seven-Year View of Alaska Developmental Profile Results

The following graph represents ADP results from seven of the past eight school years. Please note the ADP was not administered in the 2020-2021 school year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



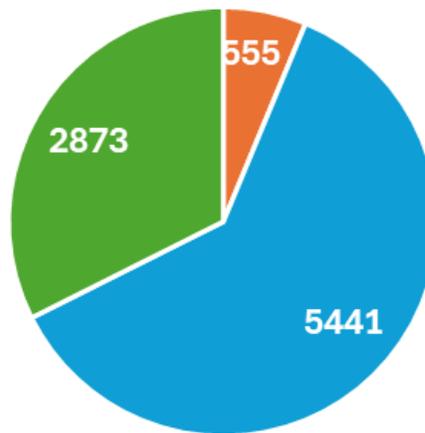
Additional ADP Data is available online at the Statewide, District, and School Level at:
<https://education.alaska.gov/assessments/results>

Amplify's mCLASS® with DIBELS 8th Edition

Alaska selected mCLASS with DIBELS – 8th Edition from Amplify as the statewide literacy screener for grades Kindergarten through Grade 3 to facilitate the early identification of students with reading deficiencies. The assessment is administered three times per year, and this data is from the Fall 2024-2025 Beginning of the Year (BOY) testing period. In Kindergarten, DIBELS evaluates three key skills: Phonemic Awareness, Letter Naming Fluency, and Decoding.

- **Phonemic Awareness:** This skill refers to a child's ability to hear and manipulate sounds in spoken words. DIBELS measures this through Initial Sound Fluency and Phoneme Segmentation.
- **Letter Naming Fluency:** This assesses a student's ability to accurately name both uppercase and lowercase letters of the alphabet.
- **Decoding:** This refers to a student's ability to connect individual sounds with letters and use those sounds to read words.

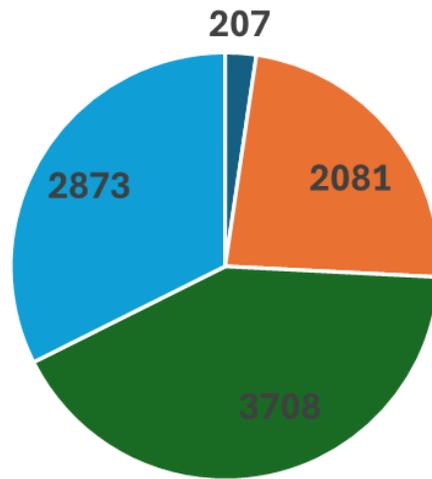
Participation in Fall 2024-2025 in mCLASS



- # of Kindergarteners who went to state-grant funded Preschool
- # Kindergarteners who did not go to a grant-funded Preschool
- # Kindergarteners who did not participate in Fall mCLASS

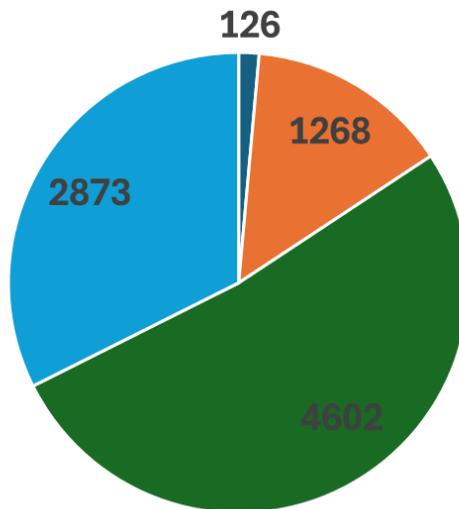
Of the 8,869 kindergarteners who were enrolled as of Fall Oasis in the 2024-2025 school year, 5,996 participated in the Fall mCLASS screening. Some schools have a screening waiver for an alternate assessment or individual families may choose to opt-out.

Kindergarten At or Above Benchmark in Phonemic Awareness
Fall 2024-2025



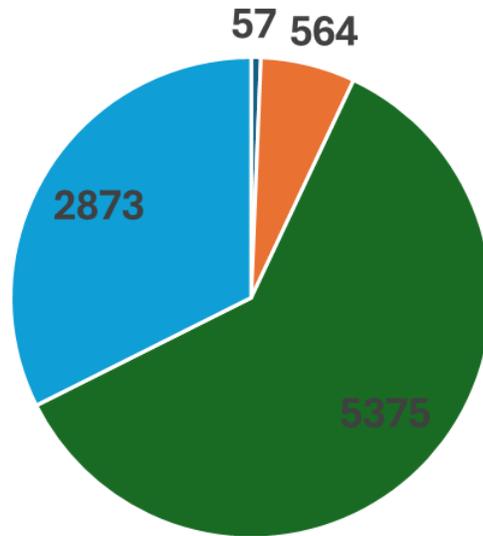
- Kindergarteners who went to State Grant Funded Preschool
- Kindergarteners who did not go to grant-funded preschool
- Kindergarteners who did not meet Benchmark
- Kindergarteners who did not participate in Fall mCLASS

Kindergarteners At or Above Benchmark in Letter Naming Fluency
Fall 2024-2025



- Kindergarteners who went to State Grant Funded Preschool
- Kindergarteners who did not go to grant-funded preschool
- Kindergarteners who did not meet benchmark
- Kindergarteners who did not participate in Fall mCLASS

Kindergarteners At or Above Benchmark in Decoding Fall 2024-2025



- Kindergarteners who went to State Grant Funded Preschool
- Kindergarteners who did not go to grant-funded preschool
- Kindergarteners who did not meet benchmark
- Kindergarteners who did not participate in Fall mCLASS