



ALASKA HEAD START ASSOCIATION

Critical Issues 2010



- **INCREASE STATE OF ALASKA INVESTMENT IN HEAD START BY \$3,500,000**

During the summer of 2008 the Alaska Head Start Association worked to put together a comprehensive two-year Head Start expansion plan to present to the Department of Education and Early Development. This plan called for \$2.5 million in new funding from the state of Alaska in FY 2010 and FY 2011 to enroll approximately 275 new children. Another \$1.6 million was included for deferred maintenance and to assist grantees to maintain existing slots that would otherwise be eliminated due to increased operating costs. While AHSA appreciates the Legislature's appropriation of \$600,000 for Head Start expansion in FY 2010, this amount allowed grantees to enroll only 59 new children in three communities. In addition, programs across the state have struggled to maintain the same quality and quantity of services because appropriations have failed to keep pace with rising costs. Increased energy costs continue to be a serious concern for programs.

ACTION NEEDED: Increase Head Start funding by a total of \$3,500,000. This amount allows approximately 220 additional children to receive Head Start services, addresses critical infrastructure needs and prevents any reduction in the number of Head Start slots available in Alaska.

- **SUPPORT A COMPREHENSIVE STATE-WIDE PLAN TO ENSURE THAT ALL EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS AND SERVICES ARE COORDINATED AND COMPLEMENTARY**

The Alaska Head Start Association supports continuation and expansion of a Pilot Preschool Program. AHSA believes that the need for Early Childhood Education in our state far exceeds what our existing systems can provide. However, the association also believes that the state has a responsibility to ensure that all publicly funded systems, existing and new, are working together to provide services in a coordinated and complementary manner. Written agreements addressing eligibility, enrollment, and recruitment need to be in place between all early childhood systems that are providing services in a common area.

ACTION NEEDED: Ensure that a comprehensive state-wide plan addressing how early childhood services will be delivered is developed and implemented. Any new legislation should require written coordination agreements between early childhood systems to eliminate duplication or competition in early childhood service delivery.

- **DEDICATE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT FUNDS TO SUPPORT HEAD START TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS**

The “Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007” has established the following professional development requirements for Head Start:

- By September 30, 2011 100% of Head Start teachers must have an associates degree in early childhood education
- By September 30, 2013 50% of Head Start teachers nationwide must have a bachelor’s degree in early childhood or a bachelor’s degree and course work equivalent to major in early childhood education.
- By September 30, 2013 100% of Head Start Education Coordinators and Curriculum Specialists must have a bachelor’s degree.
- By September 30, 2013 100% of Head Start teaching assistants must have a CDA and be enrolled in a degree program.

Alaskan Head Start grantees have made significant progress over the past five years to try and meet the existing professional development requirements. However to meet these new requirements by the timeframes outlined we will need to have a coordinated statewide response. Obtaining degrees takes time, especially when staff are taking classes via distance delivery and working full time jobs. Often this means that early childhood educators are only able to take classes in the evenings and during the summer.

ACTION NEEDED: The Department of Labor and Workforce Development should designate workforce development funds for early childhood education because it is an under-developed profession.

- **SUPPORT INCREASED HEALTH CARE ACCESS FOR ALASKAN FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN**

The Alaska Head Start Association strongly supports an increase in funding for the Denali KidCare Program. By taking this action our state will restore and expand eligibility criteria for health care coverage for the children of Alaska’s working families. The primary goal of Head Start is to make sure children are prepared for success as they enter their school years. A vital piece of this preparation is insuring that families have affordable, adequate health insurance coverage for their children, which Denali KidCare provides.

ACTION NEEDED: Increase the income eligibility guidelines for Denali KidCare to at least 200% of Alaska’s federal poverty level.