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**PROJECT ABSTRACT**

**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

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**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 first grade and the most recent data shows that only 31% transition into elementary school ready. Similarly, Alaska was just ranked last in National 3rd & 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 a better 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 at 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.

## SECTION I - Expected Outcomes

Recognizing that the first five years of a child’s life have a profound impact on both the trajectory of their educational experiences and success later in life, the State of Alaska seeks to better utilize existing resources and capacities and to develop and implement new systems to support families with young children. While the long-term outcomes of Alaska’s Pre-K Grant Proposal are that young children transition into school ready to be successful and are proficient readers at the third grade, there are many incremental steps that this application aims to address. Partnerships will be leveraged to more efficiently utilize state, local, and non-governmental resources, to share best practices and engage in continuous quality improvement among early childhood education (ECE) sectors, to build capacity and improve program quality, to increase parent choice and parent engagement, and to improve child transitions and outcomes. At a recent children and youth summit state leaders and advocates in Alaska outlined a bold vision that “Alaska is the best place to be a child.” The challenge is to implement this vision by recognizing and building on the strengths of the existing *mixed delivery system* in Alaska, which is comprised of licensed child care, early intervention and infant learning program services, home visiting, Head Start and Early Head Start, state funded preschool programs, private preschool programs, and public and private K-12 schools. By improving the quality and reach of these programs, working with educators, parents, and families, and implementing best practices, the State will work to improve child outcomes and support families throughout Alaska.

## SECTION II - Approach

The approach is simple: look at what exists, assess what families need and want, plan carefully, expand programs for parents and providers to share best practices and lessons learned, incentivize quality in existing programs, and work together to improve the system.

***Activity One*:** The needs assessment will help Alaska better understand the condition of existing ECE system and how services can be further streamlined to maximize resources and better meet the needs of children and families. Specifically, the following will be explored: (1) the strengths and weaknesses of our ECE governance structure and make recommendations for a model that increases efficiencies, maximizes collaboration, and facilitates resource sharing; (2) the availability, affordability, and quality of ECE programs and services in throughout the state and identify gaps, especially in rural communities; (3) learn about parent choice and workforce needs to understand capacity gaps related to parent needs; (4) education level and stability of the ECE workforce, especially in rural communities, as it relates to the quality, wellbeing, and retention of early educators; and (5) the data sets related to service utilization and child outcomes to better integrate this information with a goal of finding a unique child identifier to use from birth through our K-12 school system. Existing community needs assessments will be collected, analyzed and leveraged to help strengthen and focus the needs assessment will conduct.

***Activity Two*:** Alaska will undertake a comprehensive strategic planning process to help build our ECE system. Information from the needs assessment will form the foundation and be incorporated into the process including information from parents, ECE staff, and elementary school teachers to create a roadmap for building a cohesive, coordinated plan.

***Activity Three*:** Parents, as a child’s first teacher, are paramount and central to supporting and facilitating their growth and development, yet often lack the necessary information and resources to make the best decisions for their children. This is especially true for our low-income families and those in rural and remote areas of Alaska, where access is limited, programs are reduced, and English is not the primary language. Continuous quality improvement (CQI) will be integrated by building on existing programs and expand our reach to parents to ensure they have the support they need. Parents will become advocates for their children and will be able to engage meaningfully in issues relevant and important to their children.

***Activity Four*:** Best practices will be shared with early educators which include child care providers, Head Start teachers, home visitors, public pre-k teachers, and infant learning educators as they play a central role in the lives of young children in Alaska. Research links high-quality early care and education programs to long-term positive outcomes for children. Early educators will be supported by updating Alaska’s Early Learning Guidelines, expanding coaching, building capacity of Train the Trainer sessions, and increasing access to training in rural areas.

***Activity Five*:** Once the needs assessment and strategic plan have been approved there may be modifications to the quality improvements activities. Team will build on the momentum of Learn and Grow (L&G), Alaska’s Quality Recognition and Improvement System, by awarding mini-grants to grow ECE program participation especially among Head Start and Pre-K programs and to expand marketing to parents about L&G so they can use it as a tool to recognize quality and to drive demand for quality programs. Investment will be made in the workforce by expanding supports to increase access to educational opportunities—especially for rural staff—and implement wage stipends to retain qualified educators.

## SECTION III - Organizational Capacity and Management

The Governor of Alaska designated the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) as the lead agency on this cross-sector initiative because this department has primary oversight over the education of Alaska’s children. DEED and the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) have signed an MOU (see document at end of proposal) outlining the intent to coordinate on this work.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

The roles of the state partners include DEED overseeing all aspects of the project including the funding and reporting requirements, while partnering with DHSS and the key nonprofit organizations outlined below to conduct the important work described in the five activities. Within DEED, the **State Director of Head Start Collaboration**, Supanika Ackerman, located under the **Teaching and Learning Support Division, Special Education Component** is the project lead. Ms. Ackerman has a master’s degree in Early Childhood Education and has worked in the field for 13 years. She has experience working as a Head Start lead teacher, child care center administrator, and a K-3 teacher in public school. As the Head Start Collaboration Director she is uniquely positioned to work with all DEED and DHSS staff to foster alignment within Head Start, child care, and Local Education Agencies. The Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) is a major partner. The lead for DHSS will be Marcey Bish. She is the Child Care Program Manager and also serves as **Alaska’s Child Care and Development Fund** Administrator. She has a degree in Early Childhood and 24 years of experience in home and center-based child care including working in military child care. She also has experience as a licensing specialist. Also providing support from DHSS is Christie Reinhardt, the Perinatal and Early Childhood Program Manager in the **Women’s, Children’s, and Family Health Division**. She holds a bachelor’s degree in Psychology and Economics and has 8 years working in special education. Major partners outside of state government include ***thread*, AAPP, AASB, Best Beginnings and the Alaska Children’s Trust.**  *thread*’s CEO, Stephanie Berglund will be the key staff for the CCR&R. She has a master’s in Social Work and she has worked in the field for 24 years. Tamar Ben-Yosef is the Executive Director of the **All Alaskan Pediatric Partnership** and she has a master’s degree in Communication Studies and Political Communications and has extensive nonprofit experience in the field of health and wellness outcomes for children. Lori Grassgreen is the Director of the Initiative for Community Engagement at the **Association of Alaska School Boards** and previously worked with children and families around domestic violence and mentoring. Abbe Hensley is the Executive Director at Best Beginnings and has spent decades working to ensure young children are developing the literacy skills they need to be successful. Laura Norton-Cruz is the Program Director of **Alaska’s Resilience Initiative at the Alaska Children’s Trust**; she has a master’s degree in Social Work and she has extensive experience working within the Alaska Native Health System in maternal and child health and around Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).Non-state partner work will be detailed through forthcoming MOUs. DEED will directly oversee the work of the needs assessment/strategic planning work of the AASB, and program implementation carried out by *thread*, Best Beginnings and the Alaska Children’s Trust. DEED will transfer a portion of funding to DHSS who will carry out the majority of this work through internal DHSS capacity, and will enter into MOUs with partners, namely the AAPP *Help Me Grow* project. In addition, a full-time staff position in the State is proposed under DEED to staff the **Alaska Early Childhood Coordinating Council (AECCC)** which will foster continued communications between the co-chairs, further coordination and integration of the work in the two state departments, and strengthen the entire ECE system.

***Cultural responsiveness* -** DEED is seasoned at implementing culturally responsive strategies in our diverse state, and the agency is known for its collaborative work establishing and implementing Alaska’s cultural standards. Alaska’s cultural standards are not intended to be inclusive, exclusive or conclusive; but adapted to fit local needs. Another example of DEED’s leadership in valuing Alaska’s rich culture was seen through the meaningful tribal consultations during the ESSA planning process, with successful advisory support from tribal leaders. Further, Alaska’s Education Challenge Report prioritized cultural competency by identifying a strategy to “Inspire tribal and community ownership of educational experience” with a recommendation to “Create an option for self-governance compacting for the delivery of education between the State of Alaska and Tribes or tribally- empowered Alaska Native organizations.”

### **Internal Capacity**

DEED, DHSS and its partners have a track record of providing the capacity to manage the fiscal administration of this work. DEED is established under Article VII of the State of Alaska Constitution and through Alaska Statute 14.50.010, the state legislature assents its authority to the department to apply for, and accept, federal funds on behalf of the state. Currently, the Department manages and provides oversight to over $165 million of federal funds and over $1.3 billion in state aid to education in the state. The Division of School Finance, the Division of Student Learning, and the Division of Student Excellence provide the direct oversight, awards grants, monitoring grantees, and provides ongoing technical resources to grantees statewide. The selected partners are longstanding state grantees and have collaborated on the development of this proposal with the common agenda of making year one a success.

## SECTION IV - State B-5 Mixed Delivery System

### Current Landscape

While significant progress has and is being made towards the mission statement of the Alaska Early Childhood Coordinating Council (AECCC), to “promote a unified, sustainable system of early care, health, education, and family support for young children (prenatal through age eight) and their families, Alaska’s ECE system is fragmented and there is still much to do. The AECCC’s purpose is to facilitate the integration and alignment of services, planning efforts, resources, data, policy development, and funding as well as establishing connections between health, mental health, early intervention, education, and family support systems, and between public and private partners. Recognizing these needs exist, meanwhile successful collaboration is occurring on child developmental screenings, childhood assessments, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Trauma Informed Care, background checks and professional development and quality improvement, and the PDG-5 proposal is an extension of this work. The residents in the most remote communities in Alaska are dependent on regional “hub communities” for all supplies, services, and linkages to the outside world. The hub communities serve as the literal and symbolic regional centers, and most of the transit of people, goods, and information is routed to and from the smaller villages through the hub. It is in these central communities that healthcare, counseling, financial and protective services are offered, and often travel to the hub is required to access these resources. The most vulnerable communities depend on regional centers for information, and the availability of ECE programs and services beyond hub communities relies on regional supports as a critical link to the system.

#### **Mixed Delivery System Vision**

In preparation for this proposal, ECE partners developed the following draft vision statement that will be reviewed in January 2019 as a starting point for the planning process: “Alaska has a sustainable, coordinated, high-quality, 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.” To accomplish this vision, Alaska has developed several frameworks that cross ECE sectors. Alaska’s Quality Recognition and Improvement System,Learn & Grow (L&G) launched in 2016 as Alaska’s five level framework for quality early childhood programs. To date nearly a third (35%) of eligible licensed child care programs are enrolled in Levels 1 and 2. The development of Levels 3, 4, and 5 should be completed by July 2019. Pathways to include Head Start/Early Head Start and public pre-elementary programs are in progress. In addition, the System for Early Education Development (SEED) has successfully created pathways for educators across all ECE systems. SEED has over 2,000 participants primarily from child care and Infant Learning and plans to recruit other ECE sectors.Head Start and Pre-elementary programs implemented a common child outcomes assessment, My Teaching Strategies (MTS) across their programs. DEED provides technical assistance to programs utilizing this observation-based tool and has developed the Alaska CLIMBS (Child Learning & Instructional Measure for Bridging Success) framework to help guide programs on how to use this assessment in regular planning. Initial work has begun to link data in MTS to the unique identifier number (AKSID: Alaska Student ID) for K-12.

#### **Challenges/Opportunities**

The AECCC does not currently have a vision statement, and a request was made during a recent meeting to develop one. The strategic planning process offers an opportunity for the AECCC to further refine the draft vision articulated above. Another challenge in Alaska is that programs, providers and services for children birth through five are housed in multiple divisions within DEED and DHSS. While it is a strength that the AECCC is co-chaired by the Commissioners of DHSS and DEED, prior to this grant, there is no dedicated full-time staff member to support the work of the AECCC and as a result progress has been slow. There are several coordination and policy questions that the AECCC has not had the capacity to address, with unresolved issues around approved and exempt relative and in-home providers, defense and Coast Guard facilities, tribal and municipal systems, child care homes, group homes, school Head Start and Early Head Start and pre-elementary programs.

*Geographic distance -* the geographic distance to and from rural Alaskan communities which can be a barrier to engagement. There is a lack of availability and access to resources; and frequent difficulties encountered when weather or other issues affects travel, mail service, the delivery of goods, or broadband connections. Local capacity building and innovative technology approaches can provide realistic opportunities to promote engagement, and hearing from people in remote communities is a priority (See Activity 2).

*Governance structure-* a challenge exists with state governance structure which includes two oversight entities, and Alaska’s ECE system is spread across two state departments with many different funding streams and departmental priorities. The needs assessment will help determine what is working and what is not working around coordination, alignment, and delivery of high-quality services and then develop a comprehensive plan. (See Activities 1 and 2)

*Transitions –* another challenge is around transition to school. Currently, only 31% of Alaska’s children meet the established criteria for school readiness. Alaska utilizes the Alaska Developmental Profile (ADP) assisting elementary teachers with school transitions. The ADP is a teacher observation tool. Kindergarten and first grade teachers’ complete ratings for each student in 13 goals across 5 domains from the Alaska Early Learning Guidelines. As defined by DEED, students who are consistently demonstrating in 11 of the 13 goals are recognized as being ready for school. Alaska will adopt a unified definition of school readiness and update the Early Learning Guidelines and distribute to parents, ECE programs, and schools to align expectations and improve transitions. Cross training will be expanded among ECE programs around Social and Emotional Pyramid training, Strengthening Families model, and trauma informed practices to expand shared language and frameworks used across systems (See Activity 3).

*Unduplicated data –* There is no current system in place for children prior to entering the school system. Students are currently given a unique child identifier upon entering the K-12, work has begun on linking our early learning system retroactively once the students enter elementary school and explore ways in which these identifiers can be given before their entry into the K-12 system. Alaska has several opportunities to do this work due to the small size of our population and the unique identifier created through the Alaska Permanent Fund (See Activity 1).

Policies and Programs that Support Alaska’s B-5 Mixed Delivery System

Alaska’s Early Childhood Care and Education programs/providers/services are housed in multiple divisions within the DEED and DHSS. Other programs such as the U.S. Department of Defense and Coast Guard facilities and Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) Tribal providers are outside the jurisdiction of both Departments. Alaska does not have a “Department of Early Learning” or “Department of Early Education and Care” that houses all early childhood care and education programs and services. Within the DHSS, Division of Public Assistance, the Child Care Program Office is the lead for federal funds received by the State through the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF). The CCDF allocation to the State of Alaska for FFY 2018 totals approximately $17.1 million and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds and state general funds. Also, in DHSS, within the Division of Senior Disability and Services (SDS), receives approximately $9.2 million in Federal and State funds to administer the IDEA Part C services. There are 16 regional EI/ILP grantees in Alaska. Women’s, Children’s and Family Health - The Division of Public Health also finds its home under DHSS, and the largest section is Women’s, Children’s and Family Health (WCFH). WCFH is the Title V grantee and is the administrator of the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) grant. This grant focuses on helping build a statewide comprehensive system of care to support positive early development 0-5 and supported the launch of *Help Me Grow* (HMG) Alaska. WCFH is also the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (MIECHV) grant holder. This $1.9 million program started in 2012 and provides a voluntary, evidence-based nurse home visiting program for high-risk pregnant women and families, plus a MIECHV program within Tribal Health. *Office of Children’s Services (OCS)* The Office of Children’s Services (OCS) is also located in DHSS and is Alaska’s child protection and permanency agency. Finally, two programs that provide stakeholder and parent advice and assistance to early intervention and education programs, the Office of Special Education mandated Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC) for Part C and the Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP) for Part B services are located by statute within the Governor’s Council on Disabilities and Special Education (GCDSE) Alaska’s Developmental Disability Council which is part of DHSS. DEED programs, include educational programs general and special education preschool and some of the Parents as Teachers, Head Start and Early Head Start home and center-based programs. DEED helps oversee collaboration for Head Start, serving children ages three to five, in addition to oversight of state funded public pre-elementary programs, and 619 Special Education preschool programs. DEED also provides funding to support a staff person for Alaska Head Start Association. In 2015, public pre-elementary programs in the state allocated $6 million to support 158 pre-elementary programs, primarily in schools, with 33 of these operating as private programs. A noteworthy transition occurred in September 2017, when DEED no longer awarded pre-elementary approval to operate programs located outside of school districts. All private pre-elementary programs were transitioned to the Child Care Program Office and required to be licensed unless they were exempt. Federal funds are awarded directly to Head Start grantees at approximately $35 million, of which $20 million was awarded to tribal entities to support 11 Region XI Head Start/Early Head Start programs. DEED provides supplemental funding towards the non-federal share requirements for Head Start program’s federal funds.

### Statewide Policy for a Trauma Informed System

Alaska one of the first states that has adopted a state statute regarding trauma informed practice across systems: (AS 47.05.060) “It is the policy of the state to acknowledge and take into account the principles of early childhood and youth brain development and whenever possible, consider the concepts of early adversity, toxic stress, childhood trauma, and the promotion of resilience through protective relationships, supports, self-regulation, and services.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

*Alaska’s Education Policy* **-** Current state statute (AS 14.03.015) supports developing both academic and life skills in Alaska’s young people through education: “It is the policy of the state that the purpose of education is to help ensure that all students will succeed in their education and work, shape worthwhile and satisfying lives for themselves, exemplify the best values of society, and be effective in improving the character and quality of the world about them.”

*Kindergarten Readiness Definition* **-** Alaska does not have mandatory kindergarten and is one of 24 states nationwide that does not have an adopted definition of kindergarten readiness.

### **Public & Private Funding Sources**

Statewide spending on ECE programs and services totals $294 million. In addition to government spending of $120 million - $84 million from federal funding and $36 million from the State of Alaska - the parents of children under the age of six were also spending $174 million annually.[[2]](#footnote-2) These figures do not include funding from employer sponsored ECE programs, public preschool funding by local school districts, or the U.S.

Department of Defense or Coast Guard spending on ECE programs. The state’s 2015 funding is seen below[[3]](#footnote-3)



### **Leveraging Key Partners and Stakeholders**

The Child Care Program Office (CCPO) administers the Child Care Assistance, Child Care Licensing, Child Care Grant, and Alaska Inclusive Child Care Programs and funds Alaska’s Child Care Resource and Referral Network, *thread*. *thread* also houses the statewide professional development framework and workforce registry, Alaska’s System for Early Education Development (SEED) and the statewide Quality Recognition and Improvement System, Learn and Grow (L&G). Association of Alaska School Boards advocates for children and youth by assisting school boards in providing quality public education, focused on student achievement, through effective local governance. They work with DEED and local school boards to engage and support parents through the Alaska Initiative for Community Engagement (Alaska ICE) program and have taken the lead in community assessments and strategic plans for education issues around the state. The Infant Learning Program (ILP) provides family service coordination to all enrolled families, connecting them with child care resource, the medical community, and other developmental programs. ILP also provides parents, child care programs, medical offices, and other agencies working with young children ages birth-5 with access to Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) developmental screenings. This is in partnership with the All Alaskan Pediatric Partnership (AAPP), expanding the capacity for ECE programs to use and share with parents the ASQ screening. Also, AAPP and the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) program are piloting the national Help Me Grow communities of Nome, Kodiak and the Matanuska Valley for families with young children to increase access to developmental screenings and a robust referral system. They also fund a statewide call center, to provide referrals and developmentally appropriate information to families of young children. Best Beginnings is a public-private partnership that mobilizes people and resources to ensure all Alaska children begin school ready to succeed. Through programs like Imagination Library that provides books to over 20,000 children under the age of five in over 100 Alaskan communities, they are working to create opportunities for meaningful parent-child interactions that helps facilitate optimal child development. They are also working to ensure resources and materials are culturally appropriate and relevant and in multiple languages. The Alaska Children’s Trust, through its work on the Alaska Resilience Initiative (ARI), is a partner in the ECE system working to reduce childhood abuse and neglect. ARI is a collective impact effort, providing information through the convening of subject matter experts to develop and share resources, training on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), trauma and resilience work in Alaska. In Alaska over 40% of children have experienced one or more ACEs before the age of 5 and our adult population has above the national average of multiple ACEs exposure.[[4]](#footnote-4) Education Northwest will conduct the evaluation of this grant and will work closely with DEED staff and other key stakeholders to ensure the evaluation meets the project needs and addresses its priorities. The Education Northwest evaluation team will work with partners in a continuous quality improvement (CQI) cycle, document grant progress and costs in all activities.

### Target Population

The target population for this grant is children ages 0 to 5 who are low-income or live in a rural community, as defined in the Expected Outcomes section. Short-term outcomes (those realized in 2019) for families in the target population are that these families increase their understanding of child development, ECE options, and program quality. Intermediate-term outcomes (realized two to four years after the start of grant activities) for families in the target population are that these families will increase enrollment in high-quality programs and support child development at home. In the long term (5 years or more after the start of grant activities), children in the target population are expected to benefit, with more children ready at school entry and children proficient in reading at grade 3 (see Logic Model).

## SECTION V– Activity 1: B-5 Needs Assessment

### Understanding Alaska’s System and Needs

Alaska will benefit from a comprehensive needs assessment that helps better understand the availability affordability and quality of ECE programs available to families with young children, especially in rural and remote areas. For the Alaska Preschool Development Grant, the target population is low-income or rural children under age 6. Some data is available, but Alaska cannot currently able to track the unduplicated number of children needing ECE programs and services and there is no statewide waitlist at this time. Head Start and Early Head Start programs maintain waitlists and information about income eligibility. This information can be used to help understand some need in rural areas, but this data may be duplicated in urban areas where multiple Head Start programs serve the same area. In addition to understanding the system, our needs assessment will include a focus on governance and policy best practices to help identify ways Alaska can streamline its system. The planned process begins by understanding what is known about availability and quality in Alaska.

### **Availability**

Alaska has approximately 39,000 children under the age of six with all available adults in the home participating in the labor force, thereby suggesting they needed some form of ECE program.[1] Yet Alaska has just over 30,000 spaces—licensed and regulated state and tribal child care centers and homes, Head Start and Early Head Start programs and Pre-elementary programs.[[5]](#footnote-5) This indicates that over 20% children with all parents in the workforce may not be receiving services. What is more alarming is that the number of available ECE spaces are likely over-estimated because they are based on licensing figures and not enrollment numbers. Many programs struggle to offer their licensing number of spaces due to challenges with maintaining adequate staff levels and challenges with facilities—especially in rural and remote communities where many low-income children live. These numbers do not represent unduplicated children.

In a first step toward understanding the specific needs of underserved children, *thread* created a data dashboard describing the unmet need for children younger than 6 years old, broken out by census area and borough. This dashboard presents the estimated number of children that are in care more generally, not just in licensed care. Our target population prioritizes rural or lower income children. The statewide median annual household income is $69,200 (Alaska Survey Research 2017-18 interview responses from 4000 Alaska adults statewide)– but rural median household family income is only $56,560 (290 subset), and that does not consider the higher cost of living in rural and remote places, including affordability of ECE services. When a family is eligible for a pre-elementary or a HS/EHS program, there is availability, and it meets the family workforce needs, there is no financial barrier for ECE services. However, it is unknown how many children vulnerable or low-income children are not able to receive services due to ineligibility or lack of availability. The average cost of child care in Alaska costs 11.5% of the median income for a married couple. The average cost of child care for an infant and four-year-old is $22,464 for center-based child care and $19,746 for home-based child care. By region, the cost of care ranges from 13% of median household income in urban areas of Anchorage and Fairbanks, to 22% of median income in the Bethel census region The Child Care Assistance program paid for, at least in part, by some form of financial assistance (employer or government) for 15 percent of children under six years of age. The amount of child care assistance received in the month prior to the survey averaged $404 for each child under six years of age who received assistance.[[6]](#footnote-6) More information is needed about the gaps in services for families.

### Quality

Alaska defines quality child care through the standards of our new and emerging Quality Recognition and Improvement System (QRIS), Learn and Grow (see Mixed Delivery and Activity 5). These standards include health and safety, family engagement, administration and leadership, staff qualifications and professional development, and relationship and learning environments. Currently, L&G collects information on number of eligible programs participating, level of achievement, number of children enrolled by quality level, number of children on child care assistance participating by level of quality, and administrator and teacher demographic information related to education and salary. This information is helpful to determine whether vulnerable, low-income children are in high quality programs. By July 2019, quality standards and aligned activities will be developed for Levels 3, 4, and 5 to include HS/EHS/PreK programs. Once more programs are enrolled, L&G will become the backbone data source to identify program quality across the state and to identify whether low-income, vulnerable children have access to higher quality ECE options. High-quality programs need consistent, high quality early educators. Young children learn within the context of strong relationships and those are disrupted when programs have high staff turnover. Research shows that there is a strong correlation between the education level of an early educator and positive child outcomes. Alaska needs additional information about the workforce as teacher education level and retention that have a significant impact on quality. The CCPO has some data on turnover rate, however, it is not easily extractable. To address these gaps in knowledge, a needs assessment will be conducted. The areas outlined below are identified to ensure families have access to high-quality ECE programs and that children arrive at school prepared. It is a preliminary list, and a final scope will be developed.

### **Needs Assessment Scope**

The following questions are priorities for the needs assessment:

***ECE governance structure and leadership model***

* What is current structure? Where are ECE programs and services housed? What are the major federal and state funding streams?
* What things are working with current governance structure and what are the challenges towards integration and resource sharing?
* What could a coordinated early childhood system look like? What agencies or offices would lead the coordination? Which programs/offices would merge?
* Is there political will to consolidate? To coordinate? What is the policy process involved to change the system?
* What are the barriers to a successful: a) Coordinated system? (b) Consolidated system? c) Independent agency system? d) Current capacity and resources?

***The availability, affordability, and quality of ECE programs and services. Where are programs located and what is the enrollment capacity?***

* What is the quality of the programs currently available?
* What are facility needs and challenges for ECE programs?
* Where are rural or low-income children and do they have access to quality ECE? Can they afford it?
* What is the short and long-term need for ECE programs & services?

***Parent choice and workforce needs***

* What do parents need in the form of ECE programs to meet their workforce needs?
* Is there enough diversity in the availability to offer parent choice?

What are the long-term economic projections about jobs and family make-up that ensures availability for future needs?

***The education level and stability of the ECE workforce What is the education level of the ECE workforces?***

* What supports are needed to fulfill recruitment and retention needs in the ECE system?
* What incentives and supports foster a healthy workforce?
* What are the ECE workforce pipeline needs?

***Individual child data***

* What data do we have about children?
* What data systems exist regarding individual child data?
* How is it being used and how can it be shared?
* What are the opportunities for a unique identifier?
* How do you comply with privacy data? What are the challenges with using the PFD information?
* How do you link it to K-12 schools? Who houses it and who has access to it?

### **Needs Assessment Work-plan**

The needs assessment work-plan will be implemented between January and April 2019 and as a first step the AASB will assist the state in further defining key terms and target populations, and specific questions to be addressed. This effort aims to identify ways to blend resources to improve coordination, policy alignment and improve transition from early childhood programs/services to elementary school. A workgroup will provide advisory oversight for the needs assessment activities with support and oversight from its co-chairs who represent DEED and DHSS. At a January kickoff meeting, the AECCC will fine tune roles and responsibilities, assigning workgroups. Concurrently, stakeholder engagement activities under the strategic planning activity 2 will be coordinated, also led by the AASB. The information will inform a strategic planning session either at or around the April AECCC meeting, assuring the right people are engaged throughout the process and engaging CQI with a final plan completed in July. In the fall of 2019, the state will host an Early Childhood Education Summit to release the findings of these respective efforts. (See Activities 3-5).

### **Quality Analysis and Unduplicated Child Data Plan**

Alaska’s Quality Analysis will be bolstered through unduplicated child data. Alaska has a unique dataset created for the yearly distribution of the Permanent Fund Dividend, annual stipend for state residents that tracks selected information about all state residents. This data, held by the state’s Department of Labor and Workforce Development, could provide a unique identifier along with current population demographics. This option would allow for matching children in existing programs or on waitlists to avoid duplications in counting children in the state, and our assessment will address privacy questions around this possible tool. Another major component of our unduplicated plan is to align child assessments. The state of Alaska has prioritized the development of a streamlined system for aligning child assessments, using the Head Start model across programs. Resources will be dedicated to a feasibility study for aligning child assessment for every child, with My Teaching Strategies (MTS). The current unique identifier from MTS data system could be expanded to each ECE program (child care, infant learning, etc.). After engaging in a data-sharing agreement with DEED, programs could upload a list of children receiving services and those children could be assigned a unique MTS identifier. Though a newly activated feature, the MTS system recognizes duplicate children across programs and does not allow duplicate children to be added. Programs attempting to enter a child served by another program in the system could contact the AK CLIMBS staff to report in a secondary column these children, designating them as receiving services from multiple programs. This would allow for an unduplicated child count across all programs in the state. By having each program report the unduplicated number of children being served in each location, this number can be compared to the overall unduplicated number of Kindergarten students statewide reported every October by school districts as part of the school funding formula. By aggregating it with the Kindergarten cohort, a statewide percentage of 4-year olds served prior to school entry could be calculated. In 5 years, utilizing retroactive linking to students who would have been Birth to 5 to these established lists, Alaska will be able to determine the overall Birth to 5 population that received services. This could help us better understand overall need and improve child transitions.

#### Needs Assessment Coordination

A first step will be to inventory and conduct a cross-walk of other needs assessments and strategic plan and conduct a gap analysis to further refine our scope. Alaska’s 54 school districts each conduct a community needs assessment as part of their ESSA plans, and Head Starts all conduct periodic needs assessments that will be relevant to this work. In addition, the AAPP is conducting a needs assessment in 2019, funded by both public and philanthropic partners, to develop a comprehensive look at child well-being and the programs and services available to families. This effort is particularly noteworthy as earnest discussions are underway with the Perigee Fund to advance this work in coordination with the PDG5 effort, and resources to partner this effort alongside that work will be discussed as part of the scope development with AASB. Southcentral Foundation recently received SAMSHA funding for the Indigenous Project LAUNCH that promotes building on protective factors that support resilience, wellness, and healthy development of children and they will be carrying out a needs assessment for Alaska Native families in the southcentral region of Alaska. Our PDG work will coordinate on addressing the rural regions of the state using similar methodology. All of these assessments will be important, as well as information outlined in the state’s CCDF and HS Collaboration plans. Further, in the spirit of blending efforts, DEED and DHSS staff plan to serve in respective advisory roles on the Title V and the Home Visiting needs assessments, being conducted in late 2019 to ensure they build on the work in this project. Alaska also applied for the State Capacity Building Center Impact Project that provides technical assistance with ECE systems building, and if awarded, will augment our needs assessment/strategic planning efforts.

#### **Population**

As of 2016, Alaska had a total population of 736,855, of which about 65,223 (or 8.9 percent) are under six years old. About two-thirds of Alaska’s population identifies as white, while 14 percent identify as American Indian or Alaska Native and smaller percentages as two or more races (9 percent), Asian (6 percent), Black or African American (3), and Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander (1 percent). About 7 percent of Alaskans identify as Hispanic or Latino. In the overall population, 10 percent of Alaskans are living in poverty. The rate is highest among age groupings for children under 5—15.7 percent.[[7]](#footnote-7) Alaska has many communities that are rural and remote. These rural and remote communities tend to have higher percentages of their population living in poverty and who speak a language other than English at home. Public schools do serve many of these rural and remote communities (if 10 or more students are present in the community). Unsurprisingly, given the lack of population density and remoteness, it is in rural communities that the early learning system is less robust in Alaska, with few or no options for parents. For the Alaska Preschool Development Grant, the target population is children under 6 who are low-income or live in a rural community. To determine which communities, have higher concentrations of low-income children, data will be used from the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) on K-12 student eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch (a commonly used proxy for socioeconomic disadvantage). The federal Title I program provides additional funding to public schools that have higher numbers or percentages of students from low-income families, and schools with 40 percent or more of low-income students are eligible for school-wide programming. Targeted communities will be those served by these Title I schools with 40 percent or more low-income K-12 students to focus our efforts on the early learning system in areas where disadvantaged children are concentrated. To identify rural communities, contractors will use the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) school classifications and target communities whose school has a locale code of Rural: Remote (defined as a “…census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster”[[8]](#footnote-8). There are 385 schools in Alaska that serve kindergarten students (of a total of 509 schools). Using the rural remote designation, that identifies 188 different communities in Alaska. Adding in the Title I school-wide communities brings the total to 207 different target communities in Alaska, ranging from Whale Pass—a remote community with only 10 K-12 students in southeastern Alaska—to Anchorage, the largest city in the state whose school district enrolls approximately 50,000 students. These communities collectively cover about 60 percent of the school-age population and contain 302 of the 385 schools that serve kindergarteners.

## SECTION VI - B-5 Strategic Plan

### Developing Alaska’s Shared Vision for System Improvement

The Alaska Early Childhood Coordinating Council, through the support of its subcommittees, partners, staff and contractors, will serve in a convening role for development of the Strategic Plan for Alaska’s Early Childhood Education System. To carry this through, the state’s strategic partnership with the Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB) will provide critical coordination support toward consensus around a statewide planning process. The AASB is uniquely positioned with the capacity to leverage existing partnerships and is familiar with the important planning activities that will provide the basis for a statewide planning process for early childhood care and education.

#### **Develop or Update Strategic Plan**

The process for developing Alaska’s Strategic Plan for Early Care Education is established with an approach that promotes statewide CQI input throughout and after the process. A first step in the planning process will be to build on previous strategic planning efforts by conducting a thorough cross-walk of the relevant planning documents in Alaska. A crosswalk of historic plans was prepared in 2012 in a report to the AECCC, and a number that are more recent.

#### **Leveraging Partnership Opportunities**

The AECCC provides a solid starting point for convening key partners to leverage existing resources and improve collaboration, coordination and policy alignment. The AECCC meets quarterly, and the January 2019 meeting will serve as a kickoff meeting to set the stage for the planning process which is scheduled for completion/approval at the June 2019 quarterly meeting. Members will be provided a briefing summarizing the existing state plans and the process undertaken to date leading to the development of the Vision and Logic Model in this proposal and will chart a path forward in formalizing these into a long-range plan for the state. While many members have been involved in the development of this proposal, the AECCC was not able to convene within the timeframe of the FOA. A facilitated discussion about the state’s long-term Vision Statement will take place, with the final vision statement vetted through the stakeholder engagement process, and that feedback provided to the AECCC at the April strategic planning meeting. The AECCC will make decisions about their roles and responsibilities throughout the process, identifying key supports and resources to assure optimal coordination across partners. Any working groups or ad hoc committees to carry out work between January and April will be assigned at this meeting. The April AECCC meeting will be dedicated to a facilitated strategic planning which will start with context from the needs assessment and stakeholder engagement efforts followed by facilitated discussion around the priority elements of a long-range plan for Alaska’s ECE system. The draft strategic plan will then be widely circulated to a network of parents, providers and the public for public input. The June 2019 AECCC meeting will review final strategic planning documents and will consider the public input received before approving the final plan which will be submitted to PDG-5 program officials for consideration. An Early Childhood Education Summit will be held in the fall of 2019 where the final strategic plan will be officially released and distributed to a wide audience.

#### **Engage Stakeholders**

In January 2019, DEED and AASB will launch the statewide public engagement process. AASB will launch a series of focus groups and dialogue with low-income or rural families of children age 0-5. Concurrently, AASB will design and carry out a parent survey, and general community meetings will also be held. Eight site visits will be conducted to gather input from low income or rural parents about their needs and how they prefer receiving information. The meetings will be promoted through local partnerships. Locations will be in rural/remote locations and low-income urban settings. The meeting agendas will be structured in a two-way information sharing approach to use the opportunity to share CQI and best practices information while gathering parent input. State staff will attend all meetings. The qualitative input will be summarized in a meeting report. The quantitative survey results will be tabulated, analyzed and provided in a report. All this information will be summarized in a briefing paper. This information will be presented to the AECCC, with consultation of appropriate stakeholder workgroups leading up to an April 2019 strategic planning meeting. This input will also be designed to consider the Activity 3 project to update Alaska’s Early Learning Guidelines and supporting parent communication materials, marketing strategies for Learn & Grow for quality improvement efforts and any other touch points in the work outlined for this first year. At the April strategic planning meeting, a facilitated session will consider the context of what was learned through the needs assessment and stakeholder engagement efforts. Other ways to build on the needs assessment/stakeholder engagement work will be identified and priorities shared across the project. The April session will aim to establish consensus by AECCC members on the previously drafted statewide vision and establish the first draft of goals and strategies for a long-range plan. The draft will then be disseminated to a wide range of stakeholders for input which will be considered at the July AECCC meeting where a final draft will be considered for approval. The work will not stop there. Ongoing CQI activities beyond July and throughout the year one work plan will use the information learned from the needs assessment and strategic planning to inform how families can best gain from this work.

## SECTION VII– Activity Three: Maximizing Parental Choice & Knowledge

### Expanding Parent Involvement in Alaska

Families are the foundation for each child’s success and the State of Alaska and ECE programs have a responsibility to partner with families to provide services that optimize child development, are culturally relevant, and maximize parent choice. Alaska’s diverse ECE system can be difficult for parents to navigate and information about child development isn’t always culturally relevant or available in the home language. According to a 2015 statewide parent survey, while 50% of parents claimed finding ECE programs was easy or very easy, 46% found it difficult or very difficult.[[9]](#footnote-9) In addition to finding ECE services, children moving between different types of programs and transitioning into formal school are often confused by different terminology and expectations. In order to fully engage parents, especially those in low-income and rural communities, in the development and education of young children and in the successful transitions in to elementary school it is important to develop their role as advocate through parent engagement training. These are efforts to share knowledge about child development, developmentally appropriate expectations, and exposure to developmental screenings. Parent engagement leads to better education and education choice. Congress has repeatedly found that the education of children “can be made more effective by strengthening the role and responsibility of parents and ensuring that families of such children have practical opportunities to participate in meaningful roles at the decision-making level.” To ensure parents, especially of lower-income and vulnerable children, are comfortable and able to participate, their role as advocate for their child will be promoted.

#### Collaboration and Coordination Across ECE Programs and Services Maximizing Parent Choice

Alaska will build on existing partnerships with the medical community around child assessments through the Alaskan All Pediatric Partnership and Title V Maternal and Child Health Programs, IDEA Part C early intervention programs to ensure parents of infants and toddlers and families who have children with disabilities are supported, child care providers and Head Start programs, the CCR&Rs and other community based organizations to educate and empower parents.

#### Promote and Increase Involvement By and Engagement of Parent and Family Members

To maximize parent choice and knowledge, Alaska’s Early Learning Guidelines will be updated, which outline what typically developing children know and do during different developmental phases. They also help align expectations across different ECE programs, blending resources leading to better school transitions for children and ultimately better educational outcomes (See Activity 3). Once the ELG are updated Best Beginnings and All Alaska Pediatric Partnership will begin developing culturally appropriate parent activity guides in English and develop other innovative ways to share the information such as text of the week about child development. The information from parent survey and focus groups about how they prefer to receive information will be used to develop a strong parent activity information distribution plan. In year two of our work, the ELG activity guides will be expanded into Inupiaq, Yupik and Spanish.

#### Expanded Coordination of Resources for Families

Recognizing the first five years are the most significant in terms of development, it is critical that parents understand child development for typically developing children and are knowledgeable about developmental screening to help identify at-risk or developmentally delayed children as early as possible. The national program, *Help Me Grow®* (*HMG)* is a comprehensive, coordinated, place-based systemof early identification and referral for children at risk for developmental or behavioral problems. *HMG* supports efficient and effective linkage to existing community-based programs and resources through comprehensive physician, community, and family outreach, and centralized information and referral centers. States with *HMG* systems in place ensure that key community partners are aligned effectively to support developmental surveillance, screening, referral and linkage to services for families with diverse needs. In Alaska *HMG* is managed by All Alaska Pediatric Partnership (AAPP) and the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) program and they are piloting three regional communities for families with young children to increase access to developmental screenings and supporting the mental and physical health needs of young children. They have also funded a call center to provide enhanced referrals and developmentally appropriate information to families with young children. In this work with families they are expanding the utilization of the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) developmental screening and making it available to families and ECE programs. This early intervention should result in improved early child outcomes, such as more children ready for school and proficient at reading in the third grade. *HMG and* ILP have both invested significant time and resources into expanding access to the ASQ screening of children that can be shared through in-state Training of Trainers (T of T) (for 25 ECE staff), and the curriculum and materials to expand training beyond the T of T. They will then conduct additional training to additional ECE professionals to support parents in completing the ASQ. In addition, systems level work to develop a unique child identifier and determine a data system to house the information that will ultimately be helpful in transitioning children between programs and into elementary school. HMG outreach will be expanded statewide from the three pilot projects and developing and deploying and outreach expansion plan. HMG will hire a contractor or short-term/temporary employee who will develop and implement the outreach expansion plan; work with local regions/communities to identify opportunities for partnership outreach; hire or provide stipends for local outreach coordinators; and create outreach materials and develop educational resources for parents. Year one expansion to 5 communities to include: Anchorage, Homer, Ketchikan, Utqiagvik (Barrow) and Fairbanks. The Alaska pilot has demonstrated that on-boarded communities are able to sustain their work with less intensive technical assistance.

#### **Culturally Relevant Parent Education Training**

This project will expand the culturally appropriate training, Circle of Security ® Parenting, utilized throughout Alaska to strengthen parent-child attachment, cultivate and maintain secure interactions, and provide healthy options in caregiving. Infant Learning Programs plans to conduct the training in 10 new communities with low-income and rural parents of vulnerable children identified as experiencing developmental delays. Head Start and Parents as Teacher each utilize this model with parents of young children and this grant will support each of those programs to conduct 5 new Circle of Security trainings. In supporting the parent-child relationship and the child’s social-emotional development, parents will be better prepared to help their children transition into elementary school and arrive ready for school and proficient in reading at the third-grade level.

#### **Accessibility of Culturally and Linguistically Sensitive Materials**

Results from a study conducted at Stanford University were published in 2012 and found that children from higher-income families have a significantly larger vocabulary and significantly faster language processing than their peers from low-income families. Children from families of higher socioeconomic status hear about 30 million more words during their first three years of life than children from lower-income families. This “30-million-word gap” correlates with significant differences in tests of vocabulary, language development, and reading comprehension.[[10]](#footnote-10) Recognizing that many low-income children in rural and remote Alaska will be exposed to far fewer words and books than their urban, higher-income peers, parent engagement and early literacy efforts with families will be expanded. Mini-grants of $25,000 will be provided to 5 local authors to write, publish and print children’s books that are culturally relevant. Sealaska Heritage Institute is a part of Southeast Alaska’s community and has the goal to “perpetuate and enhance the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian cultures of Southeast Alaska.”[[11]](#footnote-11) They successfully implemented the Baby Raven Reads program, working with local authors and artists to create books for young children based on their Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian heritage. Best Beginnings will expand this concept to the other 11 regions in Alaska by promoting parent-child interactions through developing and disseminating culturally relevant books and materials. Interactions and exposure to books will be increased, and assist the student’s readiness for school and proficiency at third grade reading. Also 28 Imagination Library sites around the state will be bolstered with technical assistance from Best Beginnings around how to increase parent engagement and provide parent support and activity ideas, with emphasis the target population of low-income or rural families.

#### **Parent Information About the Variety, Quality, Accessibility and Affordability of ECE Programs**

In addition, parent choice will be maximized by sharing with parents about ECE options, helping them understand the different types of ECE programs and services and how to identify quality. The primary strategy is to expand and augment the work of *thread*. Specifically, the referral database will be expanded to include all the Head Start and pre-elementary school programs, so that parents have access to information about all ECE programs in one place. This will be accomplished by staff outreach to those programs and expanded capacity to update and maintain that program data about location and availability. In addition, *thread* will work with a communications firm to develop a comprehensive marketing strategy that utilizes social media, video clips, and multiple strategies to provide parents accessible information about quality care and how to be informed consumers while increasing parent knowledge of child development supports and services. *thread* currently has translator services available to meet differing language needs of parents from around the state, they plan to work with the communication firm to provide parent marketing materials in Spanish and in year two in Yupik and Inupiaq.

DEED and DHSS websites will be expanded to provide more complete information to parents about programs and services by location and link the two websites to ensure parents understand the variety of options available. These websites will have information about the school readiness definition, the Early Learning Guidelines (see Activity 4), information about K-12 standards, and information for parents about transitions. Both sites will also link to *thread’s* website, so parents receive more comprehensive information about quality and receive referral information if needed. The state IT department will accomplish these website upgrades after the needs assessment and strategic plan are developed and approved. This work will be published on the DEED, DHSS and *thread’s* website as ways to disseminate the information.

#### **Parent Engagement in Child Development and Education of Their Children**

*Parent engagement training* housed at the Women Children and Family Health (WCFH) division of DHSS will be expanded. Their family engagement lead is also the Alaska LEND Fellow and Title V designated Family Leader. There will be twenty short, 15 minute self-paced online modules developed based on several different curriculum currently used to promote parent engagement and expand parent confidence in advocating for their children. Previously conducted parent surveys indicated that parents want to receive content in small increments and they want the flexibility to complete them before 7 am or after 9 pm. Once the modules are complete, a cohort of parents will go through the training. Thirty parents will be recruited who will meet for five months via videoconference to discuss and process the information in the modules. Each month parents will be asked to complete four 15-minute modules prior to the 1.5-hour videoconference, available through their cell phones via Zoom, where they will expand and deepen their knowledge regarding child development and how to advocate for their child. Parent stipends will be available to so that any parent who would like to can attend. Our Alaska Educational Challenge Report articulates that each community must want a great school—and parents need to be drivers for this in Alaska. This training will help prepare parents to increase their involvement in ECE decisions and K-12 *transitions* by providing them training and support.

#### **Parent Navigation Training**

The Maternal and Child Health ECHO (Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes) trainings will be expanded which use videoconferencing technology to connect a team of interdisciplinary experts with providers, professionals, and community members. The discussions with, and mentoring from, specialists help equip participants to support individuals and their families in their home communities. The Parent ECHO at the Center for Human Development will increase the capacity of parents of children with special needs and professionals to work together effectively and to help ensure they have shared expectations for children and a common language which will help in ECE and *school transitions*. Alaska will host two 4-month cohorts of 25 parents each focused on children’s social emotional development and addressing challenging behaviors, because this is the most requested support from parents. The first cohort will run from February through May and the second cohort will run from September to December. They will meet twice a month for 1.5/hr. sessions via videoconference that can be accessed on their phones. They will be paid a parent stipend.

#### **Dissemination of Information to Parents**

Finally, as part of the parent engagement work and dissemination plan, Alaska leaders will host an Early Childhood Education Summit. The Summit will be in Anchorage in October and will present the work of this project, including our needs assessment and strategic plan and the Economic Impact Report for Early Care and Learning in Alaska for 2019. In addition, information will be disseminated about this project and Alaska’s needs report and strategic plan. Copies of the revised ELG and activity books will be available to participants. A family event will be in the evening so working parents can attend. The needs assessment/strategic plan, updated ELG and activity guides will be presented. The newly released movie, “No Small Matter” will be screened, a program that outlines the importance of quality ECE programs and services for families. The next day a full-day Summit will be held, where a more thorough outline the needs assessment, strategic plan, and the ELG will take place, also offering opportunities for engagement on local implementation. In addition, the updated Economic Impact of Early Care and Learning will be unveiled. The purpose of the Summit is to engage legislators, business leaders, parents, ECE leaders and other community stakeholders in discussion about the future of Alaska’s ECE System.

## SECTION VIII – Activity 4: Sharing Best Practices Among State EC Care and Education Providers

### Revising Guidelines and Expand Training

#### Collaborations, Coordination and Sharing of Best Practices

Alaska has a made some exciting progress in our ECE programs in the past decade, and to strengthen its mixed-delivery system these best practice activities can be articulated through an update of the Early Learning Guidelines. Developing a common language will help children be more successful across different systems and will improve transitions into kindergarten or first-grade. DEED plans to engage parents, early educators, kindergarten and first grade teachers, and other community stakeholders to develop and adopt a shared definition for kindergarten readiness. Stakeholders will be engaged in the alignment of ELG with the newly adopted K-12 standards and goals identified from the #AK Ed Challenge and with SEED’s Core Knowledge Framework. Alaska’s ELG’s were first adopted in 2008 and several of the developmental areas need to be revised to better align with K-12 standards and more accurately articulate what we expect typically developing children to know and do. This work will take approximately the first six months of 2019 and once they are completed, the second half of the year, will be focused on printing and disseminating the ELGs to parents and ECE programs as a systematic way for the state to provide information, guidance *and technical assistance to blend ECE program, resources and communities across the Alaska*. The work in year one to develop and share the best practices around ELGs will increase parent and early educators’ knowledge about child development, create shared expectations among parents, ECE programs, and schools, which leads to better prepared students and better prepared schools which leads to smoother transitions resulting in more children arriving at elementary school ready for school and proficient in reading at the third grade. The updated ELGs will be widely disseminated through the state and tribal licensing offices, *thread*, Best Beginnings, through medical offices, and through the summit. Electronic versions will be available on the DHSS, DEED and CCR&R websites.

#### **Partnerships Across ECE Systems**

The activities below will engage across ECE sectors and are designed to create common frameworks and languages for ECE programs, parents and children. Recruitment for participation in best practice trainings will be intentional and inclusive and will focus on continuous quality improvement for early educators.

#### **Expand and Align Coaching As A Best Practice Across ECE Programs**

Coaching has emerged as a best practice to improve the skills and practices of the ECE workforce and there are multiple compartmentalized projects around the state working to expand this type of professional development support. The challenge in Alaska is developing a cadre of coaches because our overall workforce is small, with 66% of the workforce with only a high school degree and only one ECE credential available, Alaska Early Childhood Administrators Credential issued by SEED.[[12]](#footnote-12) Expanding, aligning, and coordinating coaching efforts for professional development across ECE systems to utilize the in-state capacity is part of this project. The goal in year one will include building Alaska’s ECE coaching system to train, certify/approve and support coaching applicable to all ECE settings. This will include finalizing coaching competencies, including a common set of principles or standards for coaching; creating and supporting access to a 2-day coaching professional development seminar in the fall; and research along with beginning a framework for a coaching approval system within SEED.

Pyramid Social and Emotional Training, Strengthening Families and Trauma Informed Practice As mentioned in other sections of this proposal, Alaska has identified the need to integrate trauma informed practices and support for social and emotional development as a statewide priority due to the high propensity of ACEs in our state (See Mixed Delivery and Activity 2). In addition, *thread* has seen a significant increase over the past decade in ECE program requests for early childhood mental health consultations and their training on guidance and behavior is the most popular class they offer. Helping programs understand ACEs and social emotional development and how to implement behavior management strategies, including positive behavior interventions can reduce challenging behaviors and result in a reduction in expulsions of preschool-age children from birth to age 5. The training offering around these topics will be expanded and there will be cross training for all early educators in IL, CC, HS, and PreK, particularly on the Social and Emotional Pyramid model, Strengthening Families and ACEs. This work will have specific emphasis on ensuring training and supports are available in rural and remote areas and to programs with high expulsion rates. *thread* will conduct a train the trainer on the SE Pyramid model for 25 staff in the Spring and a Strengthening Families train the trainer for 25 staff in the summer. At least 5 of the participants from each of these trained trainers will conduct a training for other ECE staff before year. The Alaska Resilience Initiative (ARI) at The Alaska Children’s Trust will develop early childhood training on trauma informed practices and begin delivering training across the state to build community capacity around this work and to align language and expectations across ECE programs thereby improving transitions.

#### Best Practices in Onboarding ECE Staff

Alaska currently has an ECE workforce shortage and turnover in the field is very high. (See Needs Assessment) This lack of a stable workforce impacts the availability of quality spaces for children and reduces parent choice as lack of staff in many programs prevents them from accepting children up to their full licensed capacity numbers. Staff background checks, fingerprinting and new required health and safety training can slow down the hiring process across ECE programs. The process for child care licensing is much faster than the process for HS/EHS programs. For child care, the Alaska Background Check Program (BCP) issues an initial provisional background check clearance once the State fingerprint and state criminal registry has been checked and no barring crimes or conditions have been identified the employee is eligible for hire. Provisional clearance is good for 60 days and in licensed child care classrooms, they can start work into the classroom. Once the BCP has conducted the comprehensive background check and received the FBI fingerprint results on the applicant and there are no barring crimes or conditions a final determination of eligible for hire is issued. This final determination can take 4-6 weeks and under the new Head Start Performance Standards, staff are not able to start until this final check has been cleared. Having access to finger print technicians has posed a unique challenge for Rural Alaskan programs. Many programs try to fly staff out during in-service to a HUB community where these services are available. However, if the fingerprints rolled are not able to be read from by the BCP, it is difficult to get fingerprints rolled again. Additionally, if substitutes or new mid-year staff are required, it can be costly to fly people out to be fingerprinted before hire. Having a digital fingerprinting machine would be helpful in this instance where programs cannot afford to have to re-roll to get usable prints. Additionally, child programs in rural programs also face this barrier to the licensing process, by proving these digital fingerprinting machines in 10 HUB communities, it will increase capacity of programs to take children and maximize parent choice.

## SECTION IX– Activity Five; Improving Overall Quality of ECE Programs/Providers/Services

### Incentivizing Quality and Professional Development

#### ***Investments in Alaska’s Quality Recognition and Improvement System***

Learn & Grow (L&G) is Alaska's Quality Recognition & Improvement System (QRIS) and its mission is to advance the quality of early care and learning to foster the success of young children. Only 13 of the 150 Learn & Grow programs are in rural communities. Research demonstrates that high quality early learning programs greatly improve school readiness outcomes for children. They are also critical to building healthy brains, a strong economy, and a secure future for Alaska. L&G is designed to provide a quality framework for early care & learning programs that guides practices, help early care & learning programs achieve high quality, help families become informed about quality and find high quality early care & learning programs, and promote accountability so policy makers and funders feel confident about investing in quality early care & learning. L&G provides families a mechanism to gage the level of quality of individual programs when looking for care for their children. When a program is enrolled in L&G, parents can see a rating, like a hotel rating that indicates the quality level and parents know the program has made a commitment to continuous quality improvement. Marketing materials will be developed to inform parents about L&G and to encourage them to request their ECE program to participate and to increase their knowledge of quality. Currently L&G has about 35% of eligible child care programs enrolled. By July 2019, quality standards and aligned activities will be developed to include HS/EHS/PreK programs in Learn & Grow. To improve the overall quality of ECE programs, participation will be incentivized by offering mini grants aimed to reach 15 child care and 15 to HS/EHS/PreK programs to jump start their continuous quality improvement with materials and resources. L&G currently collects information on number of eligible programs participating, level of achievement, number of children enrolled by quality level, number of children on child care assistance participating by level of quality, and ECE staff demographic information related to education and salary.

*Quality Investment in the Education and Retention of Alaska’s ECE Workforce*

The Alaska System for Early Education Development (SEED) is Alaska's early childhood professional development system that outlines the core knowledge and competencies for educators, provides a career ladder for the field, and hosts a voluntary Training and Trainer Approval System. SEED also houses the Professional Development Registry, a database supporting early childhood professionals. This dynamic database tracks educational and professional development milestones of early educators on an individual basis. As mentioned previously, the workforce has low-wages and high turn-over with many educators lacking in child development knowledge (See Activity 3). The first phase of a more comprehensive workforce initiative will begin by providing wage stipend awards to retain teachers along the SEED framework. Teachers with higher levels of early childhood education will receive higher stipends to try to retain the most qualified educators. This has been piloted in child care in the past and this will include HS, ILP, and PreK during the last half of 2019. Similarly, professional development reimbursement support will be expanded to include HS/EHS/PreK that have currently only been available to child care for teacher training such as CDA reimbursement, and travel reimbursement for rural and remote programs to travel for training. *thread* administers these types of funds for child care and this quality initiative will expand the resources to other ECE sectors with a goal of blending and braiding professional development resources. Teacher training and retention is critical to overall program quality and to maximize parent choice, increase continuity of care, and ensure children arrive at school prepared, the workforce must be stabilized. The ECE industry plays a crucial role in Alaska’s economy and has an impact on the overall workforce in our state. Businesses and organizations indirectly rely on ECE programs to meet the needs of their employees that supports business, which plays a critical role a strong economy. Further, ECE programs play a significant role in the overall education of the next generation workforce. Having high-quality ECE experiences instills a strong foundation of cognitive and social skills in children, making them more likely to arrive at school prepared, be proficient in reading at third grade, and graduate from high school. Many families in Alaska have limited or no access to high quality early learning programs-- especially those in the target population of low-income or rural— and therefore run the risk of having their children face challenges both now and down the road. Early education leaders will collaborate to host an Early Childhood Education Summit, with *thread*, to disseminate the results of our needs assessment and strategic planning process and share the result of Alaska’s Economic Impact Report (See Activity 3/Budget).

## SECTION X – TIMELINE

### Timeline Narrative

The project timeline spans 12 months and is organized by quarter. Activities 1 and 2 are short-term, with all milestones completed by July 2018. Strategies to streamline procurement are being developed to assure the January kickoff is on schedule with contractors and team members ready to go. If this step is delayed, activity 5 work will be delayed. An important coordination function will serve to weave the information learned through activities 1 & 2 into all projects. For example, parents will be asked questions in the strategic planning stakeholder engagement process about how they prefer to get their information, and responses will inform how the ELG parent activity guides will be developed – through videos, online tools, etc. Likewise, as the Help Me Grow program expands into new communities, newly developed marketing tools will be shared. All the work done to maximize parental choice and best practices will culminate in the Early Childhood and Learning Summit.Efforts made under Activity 5 are very strategic and center around quality improvement. While the needs assessment and strategic planning processes earlier in the year may inform these efforts and modifications may be made accordingly, these are already existing efforts to improve quality in Alaska that will undoubtedly be the most appropriate methods to improve quality in year one. The timing of the Learn & Grow program launch is strategically aligned with the completion of the needs assessment and strategic plan completion, and the debut of our work in the first year at the fall summit will celebrate the final months of Alaska’s first year as a PDG5 state. At the same time, a robust year two implementation plan will be proposed based on the information and lessons learned the first year.

#### ACTIVITY ONE – Needs Assessment

| **Month**  | **Q1** | **Q2** | **Q3** | **Q4** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Jan** - DEED/AASB Contract; Finalize Needs Assessment Design Scope – partner consultation; AECCC Kickoff; vision statement  | **x** |  |  |  |
| **Feb** - Primary Data Collection:  | **x** |  |  |  |
| **Feb.** Stakeholder Survey/Interviews; | **x** |  |  |  |
| **Feb.** - Secondary Data Analysis | **x** |  |  |  |
| **March -** Analyze Primary Data;  | **x** |  |  |  |
| **March** - Draft Needs Assessment Report | **x** |  |  |  |
| **April** - Present Report to AECCC |  | **x** |  |  |
| **April** - Final Needs Assessment Report Complete |  | **x** |  |  |

#### ACTIVITY TWO – Strategic Plan and Stakeholder Agreement

| **Month** | **Q1** | **Q2** | **Q3** | **Q4** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Jan** - Procurement AASB; Begin Stakeholder Meeting Logistics | **x** |  |  |  |
| **Feb -** Strategic plan workgroup/committees; Strategic Plan Gap Analysis;  | **x** |  |  |  |
| **March -** Stakeholder Meeting Reports | **x** |  |  |  |
| **April -** AECCC Strategic Planning Session; Gather input on DRAFT Strategic Plan |  | **x** |  |  |
| **May -** AECCC Final Strategic Planning Session |  | **x** |  |  |

#### ACTIVITY THREE

##### All of Activity 3

| **Month** | **Q1** | **Q2** | **Q3** | **Q4** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Jan – Procurement -DHSS, thread, Best Beginnings | x |  |  |  |

##### Early Learning Activity Guides

| **Month** | **Q1** | **Q2** | **Q3** | **Q4** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Jan – DEED/Best Beginnings Procurement | x |  |  |  |
| **April –**committee begins |  | **x** |  |  |
| **June** – scope development based on stakeholder engagement reports |  | **x** |  |  |
| **Aug –** once ELG approved begin work on activity guides |  |  | **x** |  |
| **Aug – Dec**. - Disseminate Activity Guides |  |  | **x** | **x** |

##### HMG ASQ Train/trainer

| **Month** | **Q1** | **Q2** | **Q3** | **Q4** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Jan** - DEED/DHSS procurement | **x** |  |  |  |
| **Feb** - Begin Coordination, market to ECE staff | **x** |  |  |  |
| **May** – conduct first training in Anchorage |  | **x** |  |  |
| **July – Dec. -** ASQ trainings for parents and ECE staff |  |  | **x** | **x** |

##### HMG Expansion

| **Month** | **Q1** | **Q2** | **Q3** | **Q4** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Jan** - DEED/DHSS procurement | **x** |  |  |  |
| **Feb** – hire contractor | **x** |  |  |  |
| **March** – begin onboarding  | **x** |  |  |  |
| **April to Dec –** provide TA and start up $ |  | **x** | **x** | **x** |

##### Circle of Security Training

| **Month** | **Q1** | **Q2** | **Q3** | **Q4** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Jan** – DHSS/ILP contract, RFP to HS/PAT each to conduct two set of 10 training series(20 total) | **x** |  |  |  |
| **March**-funding agreements with HS/PAT programs based on RFP  | **x** |  |  |  |
| **April to June** - ILP conduct 4 trainings; HS/PAT conduct 4 trainings |  | **x** |  |  |
| **July to Sept** - ILP conduct 2 trainings; HS/PAT conduct 2 trainings |  |  | **x** |  |
| **Oct to Dec** - ILP conduct 4 trainings; HS/PAT conduct 4 trainings |  |  |  | **X** |

##### Parent Engagement Training

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Month** | **Q1** | **Q2** | **Q3** | **Q4** |
| **Feb through April** – initial development of 20, self-paced, 15-minute online modules | **x** | **x** |  |  |
| **May through June** – module development completion |  | **x** |  |  |
| **June** - Recruit low income or rural parents for fall training modules |  | **x** |  |  |
| **Sept through Dec – 30** parents go through modules |  |  | x | x |
| **Sept – Dec** - Monthly phone meetings |  |  | x | x |

##### Echo Parent Trainings

| **Month** | **Q1** | **Q2** | **Q3** | **Q4** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Feb –** First cohort of 25 parents begin zoom video call every other week | x |  |  |  |
| **May** – cohort ends |  | x |  |  |
| **July** - Fall cohort recruitment |  | x |  |  |
| **Sept through Dec –** second cohort |  |  | x | x |

##### Fall Summit – Dissemination Plan

| **Month** | **Q1** | **Q2** | **Q3** | **Q4** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Aug –** DEED/thread procurement |  |  | x |  |
| **Aug** - Hire event coordinator, save the date |  |  | x |  |
| **Aug** - Finalize event agenda and other logistics |  |  | x |  |
| **Aug - Oct** - Print materials, ELG printed |  |  | x |  |
| **Oct -** Summit held in October |  |  | x |  |
| **Oct – Dec.** - Feedback loop with participants |  |  |  | x |

#### ACTIVITY FOUR

##### Best Practices

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Month** | **Q1** | **Q2** | **Q3** | **Q4** |
| **Jan** - Procurement DEED - DHSS, thread, ACT) | x |  |  |  |

##### Early Learning Guidelines Update and Dissemination

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Month** | **Q1** | **Q2** | **Q3** | **Q4** |
| **Feb** – develop timeline and assign subcommittee | **x** |  |  |  |
| **March** – kickoff meeting |  | x |  |  |
| **April through June** – contractor coordinating work |  | **x** |  |  |
| **July –** final all committee meeting in Anchorage to finalize document and SEED approval |  |  | x |  |
| **Aug –** layout/printing |  |  | x |  |
| **Oct** – rollout at summit |  |  | x |  |

##### SEED Coaching Approval System

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Month** | **Q1** | **Q2** | **Q3** | **Q4** |
| **Feb** – RFP for contractor to facilitate process, write curriculum | **x** |  |  |  |
| **March** – hire contractor | x |  |  |  |
| **April – June** contract work |  | **x** |  |  |
| **April – June** - Monthly meeting (existing group) |  | x |  |  |
| **July – August** curriculum and framework complete |  |  | x |  |
| **August** - Materials finalized for training |  |  | x |  |

##### SEED Coaching Training

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Month** | **Q1** | **Q2** | **Q3** | **Q4** |
| **April - June** - Recruitment |  | x |  |  |
| **Sept** – Training held |  |  | x |  |

##### Train/trainer Pyramid, Social Emotional, Strengthening Families

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Month** | **Q1** | **Q2** | **Q3** | **Q4** |
| **Feb** – identify trainers and logistics/travel | **x** |  |  |  |
| J**une** – training held |  | x |  |  |
| **July – Dec**. - trainers begin training other ECE staff |  |  | x | x |

##### B5 Trauma Informed Modules

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Month** | **Q1** | **Q2** | **Q3** | **Q4** |
| **Feb** – scope refinement and training development begins | **x** |  |  |  |
| **April –** trainings complete |  | **x** |  |  |
| **May** – trainings begin |  | x |  |  |
| **July - Dec.** - Trainings held |  |  | x | x |

##### Fingerprint Equipment

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Month** | **Q1** | **Q2** | **Q3** | **Q4** |
| **March –** DEED, DPS procurement and equipment purchase | **x** |  |  |  |
| **April - Dec.** - Monitor Progress |  | x | x | x |

#### ACTIVITY FIVE

##### Quality

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Month** | **Q1** | **Q2** | **Q3** | **Q4** |
| **Aug –** approval of NA/SP and to proceed – DEED, thread procurement |  |  | x |  |

##### Learn & Grow Marketing

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Month** | **Q1** | **Q2** | **Q3** | **Q4** |
| **Aug** - Marketing firm contract |  |  | x |  |
| **Sept.** - Materials developed; Launch campaign |  |  | x |  |
| **Oct** – Campaign |  |  |  | x |

##### Learn & Grow Mini Grants

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Month** | **Q1** | **Q2** | **Q3** | **Q4** |
| **Aug** - Begin recruitment |  |  | x |  |
| **Sept** - Recruitment continues |  |  | x |  |
| **Oct – Nov – Dec.** - Onboarding continues, mini grants to programs at all levels |  |  | x | x |

##### Retention Awards/Wages

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Month** | **Q1** | **Q2** | **Q3** | **Q4** |
| **Aug -** Scope/plan developed |  |  | x |  |
| **Sept.** - Applications accepted; Stipends awarded |  |  | x |  |
| **Oct.** - Stipends awarded |  |  |  | x |

##### Professional Development Reimbursement

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Month** | **Q1** | **Q2** | **Q3** | **Q4** |
| **Sept - Dec** - Expand existing program to HS/EHS/PreK |  |  | x | x |

##

## SECTION XI- Performance Evaluation Plan

### **Approach**

The program performance evaluation will combine a process evaluation with a summative evaluation to provide information for continuous quality improvement (CQI) and identify impacts of the grant on key outcomes. Education Northwest (ENW) will conduct the evaluation and work closely with DEED and other key partners to conduct evaluation activities, provide timely feedback for CQI, and draft reports detailing grant activities, expenditures, and outcomes.(See Organizational Capacity) The Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) is a structure for CQI that embeds the use of data and evidence as central to the improvement process. This process has become well-established in research and practice over the last few decades, and ENW has used it extensively to guide improvement efforts with other clients, from individual schools to state education agencies.[[13]](#footnote-13) There are four key components of the PDSA cycle: (1)Plan: Identify concerns and root causes, develop goals, create an action plan, and select indicators for tracking progress (2) Do: Implement the action plan and collect data to measure implementation fidelity and progress indicators (3)Study: Review the data on implementation fidelity and progress indicators, evaluate fidelity and progress, and determine any adjustments needed to the action plan and (4)Act: Revise the action plan from step 1 (if needed) and repeat the PDSA cycle to implement and monitor progress on the revised action plan.

For the evaluation, ENW will work closely with partners to follow the PDSA cycle for CQI. Biweekly meetings will be held with DEED staff and key stakeholders implementing the different grant activities as the structure for coming together around PDSA. Over the first two meetings, the logic model will be reviewed and revised from the grant proposal to identify the goals, strategies, and process and outcome indicators for tracking implementation fidelity and progress (Step 1: Plan). Between meetings, the evaluation team will observe selected events, communicate with staff, and conduct new data collection such as surveys and focus groups to gather implementation data (Step 2: Do). These data will include process outputs, such as meeting notes, reports, and event attendance lists, and short-term outcomes (e.g., increases in provider knowledge as measured by survey data). After the first month, the evaluation team will summarize the data in a grant progress memo and share this memo with DEED and key stakeholders (Step 3: Study). At the next biweekly meeting, the evaluation team will review this memo with the key stakeholders and facilitate a conversation about the extent to which the activities are being implemented with fidelity and progress is being made. DEED and partners will then determine whether changes are needed and revise their strategies as needed (Step 4: Act). This cycle will repeat each month over the 12-month grant period, with the evaluation team producing monthly progress memos for DEED and key stakeholders and also supporting partners to reflect on the data and make adjustments. In addition to the evaluation’s focus on CQI throughout the 12-month period, the evaluation team will also deliver a final report in June 2020 to document short-term outcomes and reflect on progress made during the year. This report will document Alaska’s strategies for strengthening its ECE system, including how grant funds were used for the proposed activities and the strategies used to implement recommendations from the strategic plan. The report will also summarize how coordination and collaboration were developed through grant implementation, including any new partnerships that arose and how the partnerships improved the coordination and delivery of services, the extent to which the state used CCDBG to inform the grant activities and support coordination and collaboration across programs and funding streams, and the extent to which stakeholders blended or braided the grant funds with other public and private funding sources to improve ECE services. Finally, the report will document best practices for parent engagement and program delivery, including lessons learned for best practices in ECE program delivery and coordination, for dissemination of ECE program information to parents and families, and for improvement of parent and family involvement in the ECE system. Data collection for the final report will occur throughout the 12 months of the grant and 6-month period after the grant activities end, by documenting progress, implementation, and expenditures; conducting focus groups and surveys with key stakeholders to explore partnerships formed, coordination with other grants and funding sources, and use of blended/braided funding in the state; and collecting information on parent involvement from partner organizations. The information will be synthesized to address the evaluation questions.

### **Activity and Evaluation Alignment**

The evaluation team will work closely with DEED and key partners to ensure coordination and alignment with all grant activities, the logic model, the project goal, and with the state’s vision of a birth-to-five system. The logic model will be refined to ensure its alignment with the state’s vision statement as the strategic plan is developed. In addition, as the grant activities begin, the evaluation team will update and re-align the evaluation plan through incorporating new information from the needs assessment and the strategic plan and through working with a federal technical assistance provider who will provide feedback. These updates from the needs assessment and strategic plan will also feed into the PDSA process through the monthly revisiting the action plan for implementation (Step 4: Act). The evaluation team will also incorporate findings from the needs assessment to refine and finalize the target population for the grant. As described in this proposal, the target population is low-income or rural children under 6 years old. The needs assessment will provide updated information on areas of the state that have a less robust early learning system, as well as segments of the population that are underserved by early learning. For example, the needs assessment may determine that children in a particular region of the state, or a specific demographic group (e.g., Alaska Native children), are underserved. Based on the needs assessment information, the evaluation team will use existing administrative data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the State of Alaska, and DEED to finalize a list of communities and population groups targeted through this grant and calculate the percentage of the state population included in the target population. This will inform the targeting of grant activities maximizing parent choice and knowledge, expanding provider best practices, and improving system quality to those areas of the state most in need of support. In addition, clearly defining the target population will allow for later evaluation of grant progress towards intermediate (three to five years) and long-term (more than five years) outcomes (not included in the scope of this evaluation due to timing). As the strategic plan is drafted, the evaluation team will review and begin incorporating the strategic plan into the evaluation activities. For example, the strategic plan may set targets for the statewide system that the evaluation team would then include in their outputs and outcomes to track as part of the evaluation.

### Evaluation Activities

As described above, the evaluation team will support the grant implementers by holding biweekly meetings with DEED and key stakeholders (moving to monthly meetings in 2020), communicating with key partners to document implementation activities, drafting monthly memos, and producing a final evaluation report. The evaluation team will also review and provide feedback on documents created through the grant (e.g., needs assessment, strategic plan) and conduct observations at selected grant events and stakeholder convenings, including the AAEYC conference in 2019 and 2020 and the Early Childhood Education Summit in 2019. Finally, the evaluation team will obtain and analyze existing data sources for outcome information (e.g., Alaska Childhood Understanding Behaviors Survey), coordinate with existing survey efforts to include questions for the evaluation (e.g., Best Beginnings parent survey), and conduct additional data collection for implementation feedback and outcome data (i.e., key stakeholder surveys/focus groups, provider surveys, and event surveys for trainings and the Early Childhood Education Summit). These evaluation activities, and their alignment to the logic model and the grant activities, are detailed in the metrics and data sources section below. The data collected through these activities will provide the necessary information for process outputs and short-term outcomes (designated on the logic model as occurring in 2019), along with some intermediate-term outcomes occurring in 2020, which together will form the basis for both the CQI feedback and the final report.

### Metrics and Data Sources

*Process metrics***:** The evaluation team will track several types of outputs as process metrics. Deliverables are written materials, website content, videos, etc. that will be developed under the sub-activity. These materials will be submitted to the evaluation team upon completion by the state agency or contractor responsible. Events are training sessions held, along with the numbers and types of participants in attendance, as documented and reported by the state agency or contractor hosting the event. Services are measures of program delivery or services provided—e.g., the number of ASQ screenings completed, the number of providers enrolled in a registry, or the number of communities using a system. Service data and system enrollment information are typically tracked by the organization that leads the program or hosts the registry, and the evaluation team will request these metrics from the data owners.

### Program Implementation Outcomes

One source of data for tracking outcomes related to program implementation will be existing administrative and survey data held by state agencies and partner organizations (e.g., the Alaska Childhood Understanding Behaviors Survey, CUBS, from DHSS). The other source of data for tracking progress on outcomes will be new data collected through surveys, interviews, and focus groups. In addition to providing information on progress made, this new data collection will support continuous quality improvement by providing timely information about implementation fidelity. ENW will develop the survey, interview, and focus group protocols with input from DEED and key stakeholders. Each data collection protocol will go through review by ENW’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure the protection of human subjects, and all data will be securely transferred and housed on ENW’s secure server. Data share agreements will be established as needed before accessing any personally identifiable data from grant partners.

***Cost metrics***: Through its oversight of federal award funds, DEED will track expenditures on each of the sub-activities described in the proposal narrative. DEED will share this expenditure data with the evaluation team for computing two types of cost-benefit metrics: at the output level and at the outcome level. For example, if grant funds are used for a training, we will compute and report the per-person cost of the training (i.e., total cost divided by the number of participants). We will also calculate the total cost of the sub-activities that contribute to an outcome (e.g., total cost across the trainings that are expected to increase families’ understanding of child development) to estimate the total investment linked to a given outcome. In the tables below, we provide additional detail about the specific sub-activities, process metrics (outputs) and data sources, and outcomes and data sources that we will be using for evaluating implementation in each of the five main activities. Existing data sources (with data owner in brackets) and new data to be collected are noted for each case.

#### **ACTIVITY 1**

Needs Assessment includes describing the system and conducting a feasibility study for aligning child assessments. The outputs for these two sub-activities are the reports themselves and will be shared with the evaluation team by the contractors that produce them. The needs assessment will identify system capacity and unmet need and is expected to help key statewide stakeholders increase their understanding of system needs. Likewise, the feasibility study will identify the feasibility of implementing a statewide child assessment system and provide information that stakeholders can use to adopt a collective plan for ECE in Alaska. Since there are not any current data sources in Alaska for measuring these key stakeholder outcomes, we propose a survey/focus group as new data collection for measuring progress on these outcomes.

##### Activity 1: Needs Assessment

| ***Sub-activity*** | ***Process metrics (outputs)*** | ***Data sources for outputs*** | ***Outcomes*** | ***Data sources for outcomes*** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1.1 Describe system and determine capacity/needs | Deliverable: needs assessment report | Materials submitted by state/contractor to the evaluation team | Key statewide stakeholders increase understanding of system needs | Key stakeholder survey/focus group [new data to be collected] |
| 1.2 Conduct feasibility study for aligning child assessment | Deliverable: feasibility study report | Materials submitted by state/contractor to the evaluation team | Key statewide stakeholders adopt collective plan | Key stakeholder survey/focus group [new data to be collected] |

#### ACTIVITY 2

Strategic Plan is similar to Activity 1 in that the process measures are written deliverables: the strategic plan report and the stakeholder engagement reports for site visits, focus groups, and a parent survey. The data sources for these outputs is simply the materials themselves, submitted to the evaluation team by the contracted partners. The stakeholder engagement reports are intended to inform the development of the strategic plan, and the strategic plan is expected to facilitate alignment around a common vision for ECE in Alaska, so both sub-activities are connected to the outcome of key statewide stakeholders adopting a collective plan. As in Activity 1, existing data sources in Alaska do not include information on stakeholders’ collective plan, so we propose a key stakeholder survey/focus group for measuring progress on this outcome.

#### Activity 2: Strategic Plan

| ***Sub-activity*** | ***Process metrics (outputs)*** | ***Data sources for outputs***  | ***Outcomes*** | ***Data sources for outcomes*** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 2.1 Develop strategic plan | Deliverable: strategic plan report | Materials submitted by state/contractor to the evaluation team | Key statewide stakeholders adopt collective plan | Key stakeholder survey/focus group [new data to be collected] |
| 2.2 Engage stakeholders  | Deliverable: stakeholder engagement reports for site visits and survey | Materials submitted by state/contractor to the evaluation team | Key statewide stakeholders adopt collective plan | Key stakeholder survey/focus group [new data to be collected] |

#### **ACTIVITY 3**

Parental Knowledge and Choice is structured around three types of sub-activities for maximizing parent knowledge and choice: expanding programs/resources, providing parent education and engagement training, and disseminating information. These sub-activities are expected to lead to increases in families’ understanding of ECE options (as measured by CUBS and training event surveys), understanding of child development (as measured by event survey data and Imagination Library surveys), and support of child development at home (as measured by Imagination Library surveys).

##### Activity 3: Parent Knowledge and Choice

| ***Sub-activity*** | ***Process metrics (outputs)*** | ***Data sources for outputs*** | ***Outcomes*** | ***Data sources for outcomes*** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 3.1 Parent engagement training | Events: #s and demographics of parents at trainings | Participation data submitted by event host to the evaluation team | Families increase understanding of ECE optionsFamilies increase engagement and their support of child development | Event survey [new data to be collected] |
| 3.2 Echo parent trainings | Events: #s and program types from ECE staff are trained as trainers, #s and demographics of parents at ASQ trainings, #s/program types of ECE staff at ASQ trainings | Participation data submitted by event host to the evaluation team | Families increase understanding of child developmentFamilies increase engagement and their support of child development | Event survey [new data to be collected] |
| 3.3 Circle of Security parent education | Events: #s and demographics of parents/families at trainings | Participation data submitted by event host to the evaluation team | Families increase understanding of child development | Event survey [new data to be collected] |
| 3.4 HMG – train the trainer and expansion | Services: #s and demographics of families in contact with "care coordinators", #s of ASQs completed | Help Me Grow program data [owner: All Alaska Pediatric Partnership] | Families increase understanding of ECE options | Alaska Childhood Under-standing Behaviors Survey (CUBS) [owner: DHSS] |
| 3.5 Rural author minigrants  | Services: # of grants awarded to Alaska Native authors; # of new communities in Baby Raven ReadsDeliverable: Culturally relevant books | Grant award data on authors/books submitted by DEED and Baby Raven Reads program data submitted by Best Beginnings to the evaluation team | Families increase understanding of child developmentFamilies increase their support of child development at home | Imagination Library survey data [owner: Best Beginnings] |
| 3.6 Parent engagement Imagination Library | Services: #s of teleconferences, calls, and site visits to Imagination Library sites | Participation data submitted by technical assistance provider to the evaluation team | Families increase understanding of child developmentFamilies increase engagement and their support of child development  | Imagination Library survey data [owner: Best Beginnings] |
| 3.7 Early learning activity guides | Deliverable: videos and activity guide documents | Materials submitted by state/contractor to the evaluation team | Families increase understanding of child developmentFamilies increase engagement and their support of child development  | Imagination Library survey data [owner: Best Beginnings] |
| 3.8 Marketing plan/implementation | Deliverable: marketing strategy document | Materials submitted by state/contractor to the evaluation team | Families increase understanding of ECE options | Alaska Childhood Understanding Behaviors Survey (CUBS) [owner: DHSS] |
| 3.9 Expand thread referral database | Events: #s of Parent Talk events heldServices: #s of Head Start, Early Head Start, and PreK programs added to CCR&R database | Participation data submitted by event host to the evaluation team; CCR&R program database [owner: thread] | Families increase understanding of ECE options | Alaska Childhood Understanding Behaviors Survey (CUBS) [owner: DHSS] |
| 3.10 DEED/DHSS website expansion | Deliverable: DEED and DHHS webpages with content aligned to needs assessment and strategic plan | Materials submitted by state/contractor to the evaluation team | Families increase understanding of ECE options | Alaska Childhood Understanding Behaviors Survey (CUBS) [owner: DHSS] |
| 3.11 Fall ECE Summit | Events: #s and demographics of parent participants; #s and types of other ECE stakeholder participants | Participation data submitted by event host to the evaluation team | Families increase understanding of ECE options | Event survey [new data to be collected] |

#### **ACTIVITY 4**

The sub-activities under Activity 4 are centered on supporting providers to implement best practices for high-quality ECE programs. The revised Early Learning Guidelines will be a deliverable that the contractor submits to the evaluation team as the output for that activity, and this is intended to support increased stakeholder understanding of system needs and a collective vision/plan, as well as increased provider understanding of best practices and blending/braiding funds (as measured by key stakeholder survey/focus group and provider survey, respectively). Expanding coaching capacity and provider trainings will have event participation data as outputs, and these sub-activities are expected to help providers improve their quality and move up in the QRIS (as measured by system data in the QRIS, held by thread). Finally, the expedited fingerprinting infrastructure for Head Start, Early Head Start, and PreK will be measured by equipment purchase and training participation data. This new process is expected to expand service capacity at these sites by bringing new staff on board and ultimately to increasing enrollment in high quality programs (as measured by enrollment data from Head Start Information Reports and the state’s Pre-Elementary Grant program).

##### Activity 4. Share best practices with providers

| ***Sub-activity*** | ***Process metrics (outputs)*** | ***Data sources for outputs*** | ***Outcomes*** | ***Data sources for outcomes*** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 4.1 Early Learning Guidelines | Deliverable: new Early Learning Guidelines document | Materials submitted by state/contractor to the evaluation team | Key stakeholders increase understanding of system needs and adopt collective planProviders increase understanding of best practices and blending/braiding fundsECE and K12 providers increase understanding of school transition | Key stakeholder survey/focus group [new data to be collected]; Provider survey [new data to be collected] |
| 4.2 SEED coaching – train the trainer and approval system  | Events: # of coaches trainedDeliverables: Coaching Approval System adopted by SEED council | Participation data submitted by event host to the evaluation team | Providers increase understanding of best practices Providers implement best practices and increase quality  | Learn & Grow system database [owner: thread] |
| 4.3 Expand trainings: Social and Emotional Pyramid and Strengthening Families | Events: # of trainers trained; #s and types of programs that receive training | Participation data submitted by event host to the evaluation team | Providers increase understanding of best practicesProviders implement best practices and increase quality  | Learn & Grow system database [owner: thread] |
| 4.4. B-5 trauma informed modules | Events: #s and types of programs that receive training | Participation data submitted by event host to the evaluation team | Providers increase understanding of best practicesProviders implement best practices and increase quality  | Learn & Grow system database [owner: thread] |
| 4.5 Fingerprinting equipment | Services: # of communities that receive equipment and training for expedited fingerprinting | Equipment purchase and training participation data submitted by Department of Public Safety to the evaluation team | Providers increase understanding of best practices Providers implement best practices and increase qualityFamilies increase enrollment in high-quality programs | Head Start Program Information Reports [owner: federal Office of Head Start]; Alaska Pre-Elementary Grant program data [owner: DEED] |

#### **ACTIVITY 5**

Activity 5 aims to improve families’ understanding of ECE program quality and to increase the quality of ECE programs in the state. First, incentives for ECE programs to enroll in the Learn & Grow (Alaska’s QRIS) are expected to lead to increased participation in L&G. Second, marketing materials for parents about L&G (as measured by the written/electronic content created by the contractor) are expected to lead to improvements in families’ understanding of ECE program quality (as measured by CUBS). Finally, incentives for individual staff to stay in their positions and enroll in continuing education are expected to result in increased staff retention as well as increased participation and higher staff education levels in the professional development system (SEED). The outcomes for providers and individual staff will be measured by data from the two system databases, both housed at thread.

##### Activity 5. Improve overall system quality

| ***Sub-activity*** | ***Process metrics (outputs)*** | ***Data sources for outputs*** | ***Outcomes*** | ***Data sources for outcomes*** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 5.1 Learn & Grow mini grants  | Services: #s/types of programs that enroll; #s grants awarded | Learn & Grow system database [owner: thread] | Providers increase participation in QRIS | Learn & Grow system database [owner: thread] |
| 5.2 Learn & Grow marketing  | Deliverables: content developed (e.g., posters, videos) | Materials submitted by state/contractor to evaluation team | Families increase understanding of ECE program quality | Alaska Childhood Understanding Behaviors Survey (CUBS) [owner: DHSS]; ILP family survey [owner: DHSS] |
| 5.3 Retention awards/wages | Services: #s and demographics of applicants; #s demographics of recipients | SEED system database [owner: thread] | Providers increase participation in PD systemProviders increase quality/staff retention | SEED system database [owner: thread] |
| 5.4 Professional development reimbursement | Services: #s and demographics of recipients | SEED system database [owner: thread] | Providers increase participation in PD systemProviders increase quality/staff retention | SEED system database [owner: thread] |

## SECTION XII - Logic Model and Narrative

The goal of this grant is to prepare low-income or rural children for success in school by developing a coordinated high-quality ECE system that provides parents high-quality options that meet their needs. To accomplish this goal, the state and its partners propose a series of activities that will build on each other to engage and inform families and providers in the short term, support quality practices and increased enrollment in quality programs in the intermediate term, and ultimately lead to improved child outcomes in the early elementary years. Alaska’s proposed activities are organized in a logic model (see preceding page) that illustrates the state’s key strategies for achieving its vision of preparing children for school and for life. This logic model will be used for designing and managing the project and helps to frame the evaluation of the grant; the evaluation will measure the extent to which the outputs and outcomes occur.

Key inputs for achieving this broad vision are the people and organizations currently working hard to serve young children in Alaska, the structures the state already has in place, and blended funds from this grant and other sources.

### Logic Model

The following details the logic model for this grant followed by a narrative section.

**Vision**: Alaska has a sustainable, coordinated, high-quality birth to five ECE system offering all families services that maximize parental choice, are culturally inclusive, promote optimal development, and prepare children for school and life.

**Target population**: Low-income or rural (60% children 0 to 5)

**Project goal**: Prepare children for success in school by developing a coordinated high-quality ECE system that provides parents options that meet their needs.

| **Inputs** | **Activities** | **Outputs *(activity number)*** | **Outcomes *(activity number)*** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| State agency leadership Collaborative partnersMixed delivery system of ECE providersParents and familiesState infrastructure for early learning:* child screening, assessments
* ELG
* PD system
* QRIS

Blended funding from federal, state, and local sources | **1. Needs assessment*** Describe system and determine capacity/needs
* Conduct feasibility study

**2. Strategic plan*** Develop strategic plan
* Engage stakeholders

**3. Parent knowledge/choice*** Expand programs/resources
* Provide parent education and engagement training
* Disseminate information

**4. Provider best practices*** Revise ELG
* Expand provider coaching and trainings
* Expedite fingerprinting

**5. Improve system quality*** Inform parents of QRIS
* Incentivize participation in QRIS and PD systems
 | State system:* Needs assessment report (1)
* Feasibility study (1)
* Strategic plan (2)
* Stakeholder engagement reports (2)
* Parent marketing strategy plan (3)
* Updated state agency websites (3)
* Early learning summit (3)
* Updated ELG and aligned parent activity guides (3,4)
* Culturally relevant books (3)

Parents and families:* #s/demographics of families served by expanded programs/resources (3)
* #s/demographics of families in trainings/dissemination events (3,5)

Providers: * #s/types of providers served by expanded coaching and training (4)
* #s/demographics of new staff in expedited fingerprinting (4)
* #s/types of programs receiving incentives for QRIS (5)
* #s/demographics of staff receiving incentives for education/PD (5)
 | Short-term (2019): * Key stakeholders increase understanding of system needs and adopt collective plan (1,2,4)
* Families increase understanding of child development, ECE options, and program quality (3,5)
* Providers increase participation in QRIS and PD systems (5)
* Providers increase understanding of best practices and blending funds (4)
* ECE and K12 providers increase understanding of school transition (4)

Intermediate-term (2020-2022): * Families increase enrollment in high-quality programs, engagement, and support of child development (3,5)
* Providers implement best practices, increase quality, retain staff (4,5)
* Providers increase blending funds (4)
* ECE and K12 providers increase coordination on school transitions (4)

Long-term (2023 on):* More children ready for school (1-5)
* More children proficient in reading in grade 3 (1-5)
 |

State agency leadership from DEED and supported by DHSS and the AECCC (co-chaired by DEED and DHSS), will oversee and guide the proposed activities. Collaborative partners like the CCR&R (*thread*), advocacy and early literacy partners (e.g., Best Beginnings), health services (e.g., All Alaska Pediatric Partnership), and others will implement the activities. Alaska’s ECE mixed delivery system includes licensed child care, Head Start and Early Head Start, state-funded preschool programs, early intervention and infant learning program services, private preschool programs, and public and private K-12 schools. ECE providers in this mixed delivery system work together with parents and families to support children ages 0 to 5 and can help improve child outcomes by implementing best practices for high-quality programs and family supports. Alaska’s state infrastructure for early learning will facilitate the work by providing starting points for developing new resources (such as the existing early learning guidelines that will be updated); structures for guiding improvement efforts such as the professional development system (SEED) and the QRIS (Learn & Grow); and child development screeners (ASQ) and assessments for measuring progress on child outcomes (My Teaching Strategies and ADP). Blended funding will support this work by leveraging PDG grant dollars and local matching funds to complement existing government funds (at the federal, state, and local levels) and philanthropic investments in ECE. The activities for the grant fall into five categories: (1) a needs assessment, (2) a strategic plan, (3) increasing parent knowledge and choice, (4) sharing best practices with providers, and (5) improving the quality of the ECE system. All activities lead to different outputs at the state system, parent/family, and ECE provider levels, with each output in the logic model followed by numbers corresponding to the activity or activities which correspond to that output. These outputs are expected to impact outcomes among state stakeholders, families, providers, and children; again, each outcome is followed by numbers corresponding to the activity/activities expected to contribute to that outcome. There are three sets of outcomes we would expect to see as a result of the activities and associated outputs shown above: short-term improvements in identifying areas of need, aligning strategies for improving the state’s ECE system, and helping families and providers to be informed about the ECE system and best practices; intermediate-term changes in provider and family behavior, reflected in the quality of programs and practices as well as increased enrollment in high-quality programs; and long-term improvements in child outcomes. We anticipate that many grant activities, such as parent trainings and provider coaching, will first change understanding (short-term—2019), then behavior (intermediate-term—2020-2022), and then result in an impact on child outcomes (long-term—2023 and later).

### **Needs Assessment**

The needs assessment will describe the current ECE system in Alaska, examining the governance structure and best practices in governance; the availability, affordability, and quality of ECE programs and services (including an unduplicated count of children receiving services); parent choice and workforce needs; the education level and stability of the ECE workforce; and available individual child data in the state. In addition, under the needs assessment, the state will conduct a feasibility study for aligning child assessment to understand the cost to support a statewide assessment system. State system outputs will include a needs assessment report with unduplicated counts of current system capacity and unmet needs and a report summarizing the results of the feasibility study. The short-term outcome from the needs assessment and feasibility study is that key stakeholders will increase their understanding of system needs, which will guide the work of the grant in all other areas.

### **Strategic Plan**

The strategic plan will align stakeholders around a shared vision through statewide engagement activities including a focus group and parent survey. The resulting plan will guide system improvements and will be aligned with the state vision, grant logic model, and needs assessment. State system outputs are a written strategic plan with a shared vision for the Alaska ECE system and priority areas for system improvement along with stakeholder engagement reports from the site visits, focus groups, and parent survey. The short-term outcome from this activity is that key stakeholders adopt a collective plan for the ECE system that will guide and align other grant activities and help achieve the state’s vision for the ECE system.

***Maximizing parent choice and knowledge*** will engage parents through expanding programs and resources providing parent education and engagement training and disseminating information to parents. Parent/family outputs from include the numbers and demographics of families served by expanded ECE programs and services and the numbers and demographics of those who participated in trainings and dissemination events. State system outputs for these activities include a marketing strategy plan for reaching parents and families through innovative approaches, updated ECE program information on state agency websites, culturally relevant books, and an early learning summit. For families, short-term outcomes include an increased understanding of child development and ECE options. In the intermediate term, we would expect to see more engaged parents along with families increasingly supporting child development as a result of the expanded programs/resources, trainings, and dissemination activities.

***Sharing best practices*** with providers will include revising the state’s early learning guidelines; expanding coaching and trainings and expedited fingerprinting. Provider outputs include the numbers and types of providers served by expanded coaching and training and the numbers and demographics of new staff approved for work through the expedited fingerprinting process. State system outputs are revised early learning guidelines (ELG) that align with other state standards and with the state’s vision and goals for the ECE system. Short-term outcomes related to sharing best practices with providers include improved understanding of possibilities for blending and braiding funds to support their programs (through the revised ELG) and increased understanding of best practices for school transitions (from the revised ELG and the expanded trainings). In addition, the ELG revision increases stakeholder understanding of system needs and adoption of a collective plan. We expect to see intermediate-term outcomes of providers implementing best practices and increasing program quality and staff retention (through the revised ELG, expanded provider coaching and trainings, and expedited staff fingerprinting). We also expect in the intermediate term that more providers will use blended funding as a result of increased understanding of how to blend and braid funding. We also expect to see more coordination among ECE and K12 providers around supporting school transitions.

***Improving overall system quality*** will occur through providing QRIS information to parents, incentivizing participation by ECE programs in the QRIS, and providing wage stipends and reimbursement for professional development among ECE staff. Outputs from these activities will include the numbers and demographics of parents/families reached by the dissemination of QRIS information, the numbers and types of programs receiving QRIS enrollment incentives, and the numbers and demographics of ECE staff receiving education reimbursements and retention stipends. In the short-term, we expect to see families increasing their understanding of program quality (from QRIS information to parents) and providers increasing their participation in the QRIS and PD systems (from the incentives). In the intermediate-term, we expect to see families increasing their enrollment in high-quality programs and providers increasing their quality and levels of staff retention.

***Long-term outcomes*** Finally, in the long-term, we would expect that all grant activities (1 through 5) will have contributed to Alaska having more children “ready” at school entry (as measured by a kindergarten entry assessment) and proficient in reading in grade 3 (as measured by a statewide reading assessment). The needs assessment (Activity 1) and strategic plan (Activity 2) strengthen the foundation of a sustainable and coordinated ECE system, while maximizing parent knowledge and choice (Activity 3) ensures all families can benefit. Sharing best practices with providers (Activity 4) ensures programs are culturally inclusive and promote optimal development. Improving system quality (Activity 5) results in more high-quality birth-to-five programs. Thus, all five activities work together to achieve Alaska’s vision and achieve the long-term goals of children being prepared for school and life.

## SECTION XIII - Project Sustainability Plan

Alaska has a long history of receiving federal funding, developing infrastructure, and then losing funding – particularly in rural areas where our target population lives. Our leadership is adept at understanding the dangers of this approach. With sustainability in mind, this project has been approached through the lens of long-range sustainability as a key objective across all activities, and this lens will be continued through the needs assessment and strategic planning activities. All the activity 3 and activity 4 projects were fully vetted to assure they would add capacity while not creating new infrastructure beyond year one if funding could not be sustained. All projects were selected using the criteria that if year two funding did not become available there would still be a positive impact. An example can be found in the Help Me Grow Expansion and the Imagination Library capacity building projects – both provide one year contractual or temporary hire funds to build local community capacity instead of hiring a long-term dedicated staff person to simply manage a program. We believe that even with one year of this support, those communities and families that live there will be strengthened even if this work did not continue. The strategic planning process will identify ways to incorporate similar approaches to help build capacity that can be sustained. In the long term, DEED and DHSS are already exploring the possibility of using state Pre-K funds as maintenance of effort or match for the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), potentially freeing up other state general funds to help sustain these efforts. Another priority in the planning process will be to increase collaboration and coordination with American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) Tribal CCDF grantees to braid funding to support Alaska’s ECE system. As some of our statewide systems are streamlined, the goal is to align federal funding to those systems, for example, as the Learn and Grow system is developed quality dollars from state and tribal CCDF and HS Collaboration can help support those efforts. Similarly, work around the development of Alaska’s Professional Development system, SEED, can be more efficiently supported with existing dollars. In year one of the grant, significant efforts were made to invest in capacity building that expands the knowledge and skills of parents, community groups, and early educators after grant funding. Alaska values sustainability, and it will continue to be the framework for planning and implementation activities we take on. The Department of Education and Early Development and the Department of Health and Social Services recognizes the complexity of this work and acknowledges it will take time, dedication, and creativity to move us from our current fragmented ECE system to a fully functioning, well-coordinated, unified ECE system. We also recognize there are action steps/activities that can be accomplished, with little to no funding that can create significant improvements/efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery, while others require financial support. DEED and DHSS in partnership with the Alaska Early Childhood Coordinating Council (AECCC) will use information gleaned from the needs assessment and strategic plan to identify and take action on opportunities for better alignment of statutes and regulations, policies and procedures, and data collection, reporting and analysis. We will look closely at our organizational structures to identify opportunities for increased efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery. We will partner with other State Departments such as Public Safety and Labor and Workforce Development to do the same and to identify funding sources within their departments that may be used to support and strengthen the ECE system. We plan to explore the possibility of using state Pre-K funds as maintenance of effort or match for the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), potentially freeing up other state general funds to help sustain these efforts. Additionally, we plan to increase collaboration and coordination with American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) Tribal CCDF grantees to braid funding to support Alaska’s ECE system and to further explore State/Tribal compact agreements, like the Child Welfare Compact.  Finally, shared services will be explored, employer sponsored early childhood care and education, opportunities associated with the legalization of marijuana and resources that may be available to support the ECE system to name a few. As some of our statewide systems are developed the goal is to align federal funding to those systems, for example, as Alaska’s Learn and Grow system is developed quality dollars from state and tribal CCDF and HS Collaboration to name a few can help support those efforts. Similarly, work around the development of Alaska’s Professional Development system, SEED, can be more efficiently supported with existing dollars. Efforts were made to invest in capacity building efforts that expand the knowledge and skills of parents, community groups, and early educators.

## SECTION XIV – Dissemination Plan

This project will use the needs assessment and strategic planning processes as a way to develop an ongoing feedback look with families and professionals. The project is designed to set the stage through the stakeholder engagement sessions, gathering feedback while sharing information with families, incorporating what we heard into a planning document, then asking for feedback again. Our partners will reach an audience through the work that is done under this project – and the information that we learn will be shared and blended across efforts. Finally, at the Early Childhood Education Summit in the fall we will host a family evening to engage parents and disseminate information and we will invite parents to join the following full-day meeting. We will reach ECE and elementary professionals through the best practice trainings and specific outreach to those populations. In addition, to the Summit, we will develop an outreach strategy around funders and legislators and conversations with decision makers.

## SECTION XV – Third Party Agreements

MOU with DHSS is attached

## SECTION XVI - Plan for Oversight of Federal Award Funds

See Management Section

## SECTION XVII – Budget and Budget Justification

Public may ask DEED to provide at (907) 465-6535.

1. Adverse Childhood Experiences: Overcoming ACEs in Alaska. Prepared for the Alaska Mental Health Board and the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse. Available at [DHSS ACE Website](http://dhss.alaska.gov/abada/ace-ak/Pages/default.aspx) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Economic Impact for Early Care and Learning in Alaska, The McDowell Group (2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Economic Impact for Early Care and Learning in Alaska, The McDowell Group (2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Adverse Childhood Experiences: Overcoming ACEs in Alaska. Prepared for the Alaska Mental Health Board and the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse. Available at: [DHSS ACE Website](http://dhss.alaska.gov/abada/ace-ak/Pages/default.aspx)

 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Alaska’s Early Care and Learning Data Dashboard, The McDowell Group (2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Economic Impact for Early Care and Learning in Alaska, The McDowell Group (2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. United States Census Bureau/American Fact Finder. (2017). “*2012 – 2016 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates*.” U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey Office. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. National Center for Educational Statistics. (Undated). Appendix D: NCES Locale Codes. Accessed 11.4.18 from https://nces.ed.gov/handbook/data/pdf/appendix-d.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Economic Impact of Early Care and Learning in Alaska, The McDowell Group (2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/desc.12019 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. http://www.sealaskaheritage.org/about [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. System for Early Education and Development Professional Development Registry (2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Deming, 1986. Need full citation [↑](#footnote-ref-13)