Alaska’s Pre-Elementary Grant Program

Who It Serves, How It Works, and How It Connects to Student Outcomes

Alaska’s Pre-Elementary Grant (PEG) program, funded through the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) since 2016/17, aims to develop and expand preschool programs by providing flexible funding to school districts to increase preschool access and improve kindergarten readiness. In a recent study, Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Northwest used documents, interviews with PEG program directors, and administrative data to examine PEG program participation and implementation (2016/17 to 2018/19), and the relationship between state-funded preschool (including both earlier state-funded programs and PEG) and student outcomes (2014/15 to 2018/19). This infographic highlights study findings and implications that may be helpful to education policymakers in Alaska.

PEG participation

In 2018/19, 24 of 53 Alaska school districts with elementary programs received PEG funding.1 These districts included rural remote districts and urban districts such as Anchorage, which has 36 percent of all kindergarten students in the state. In 11 of these districts, PEG programs were the only preschool option.2

PEG programs in rural areas played a key role in providing preschool access in 2018/19

51% of all kindergartners in rural schools had been served by rural PEG programs.

9% of all kindergartners in urban schools had been served by urban PEG programs.

Districts that received PEG funding in 2018/19 tended to have higher percentages of historically disadvantaged kindergartners than non-PEG districts, meeting one of the goals of the program.

PEG students in 2017/18 and 2018/19 were more likely to be Alaska Native or enrolled in rural remote schools than non-PEG students in the same districts. PEG students were less likely to be White or have an individual education plan than non-PEG students in the same districts.

PEG implementation

Although many PEG programs shared the same goals, they used a variety of strategies to achieve these goals in their communities. This is how the 24 PEG programs used or planned to use PEG funding.3

- Designed and developed a new preschool program: 6
- Implemented their PEG program with support from partnerships—collaborations with external organizations that provide staffing, child care, instruction, or free facility space: 8
- Provided or supported preschool services at more than one location: 16
- Supported or expanded an existing preschool program or structure: 18
- Supported professional development: 19
- Supported staffing costs: 20

Artwork provided by Holly Mititquaq Nordlum, Inupiaq
Student outcomes

The study team explored the connection between student outcomes and attending a PEG program (for 2017/18 and 2018/19 kindergarten cohorts) or other state-funded preschool (for 2014/15 to 2016/17 kindergarten cohorts). These regression analyses do not provide causal evidence of the impact of state-funded preschool on outcomes.

Kindergarten readiness
Participation in state-funded preschool was associated with higher performance on the Alaska Developmental Profile (a measure of kindergarten readiness) from 2014/15 to 2018/19.

38% of PEG students were considered kindergarten ready in 2018/19
32% of non-PEG students were considered kindergarten ready in 2018/19

Attendance
Participation in state-funded preschool was associated with higher average annual kindergarten attendance rates from 2016/17 to 2018/19.

English language proficiency
Participation in state-funded preschool was linked to higher kindergarten English language proficiency from 2016/17 to 2018/19.

Grade 3 math & reading standardized assessments
State-funded preschool participation was positively related to grade 3 math standardized test scores for the 2015/16 kindergarten cohort. For the same cohort of students in Anchorage only, state-funded preschool participation had a positive relationship with grade 3 standardized test scores in both math and reading.

Outcomes for historically disadvantaged student groups
State-funded preschool participation was associated with increased kindergarten readiness, English language proficiency, attendance, and grade 3 math scores for Alaska Native and economically disadvantaged students.

Implications for Alaska stakeholders

Based on the study findings, stakeholders in Alaska and within DEED can consider the following implications:

• Incentivize PEG enrollment for historically disadvantaged students, especially in nonurban districts where the proportions of historically disadvantaged students are lower.
• Provide a set amount of funds for districts with fewer preschool-eligible students to defray the fixed costs of operating a preschool program, especially in rural remote communities.
• Collect and analyze data on preschool quality and program practices to understand the relationship between program components and outcomes and how implementation varies across districts.
• Conduct further research to determine if PEG program participation has causal links to positive student outcomes.

References

1 Alaska has 54 school districts. Fifty-three districts have elementary programs, and one district is a boarding school for grades 9–12.
3 Data on funding usage were not available from all districts.
4 These are adjusted percentages that use regression analysis to account for differences between the two groups being compared.
5 See endnote 4.


This infographic was prepared under Contract ED-IES-17-C-0009 by Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest, administered by Education Northwest. The content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.