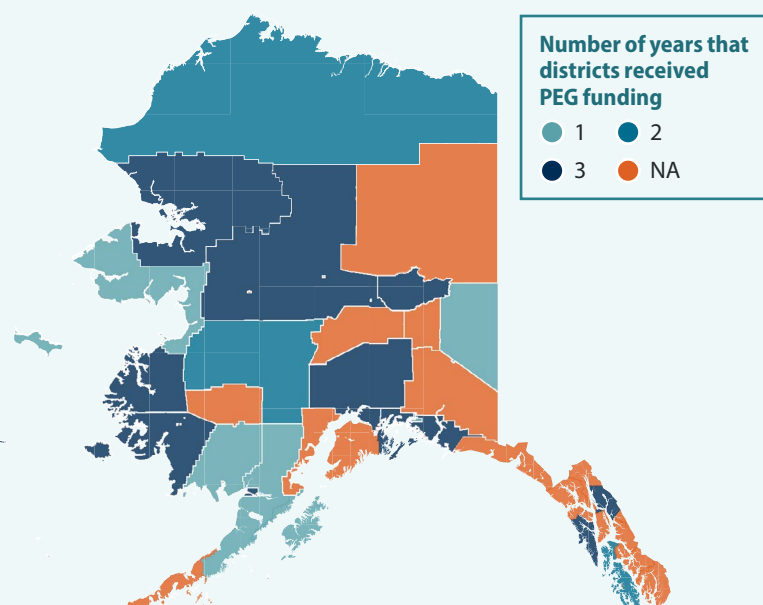


Alaska's Pre-Elementary Grant Program

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

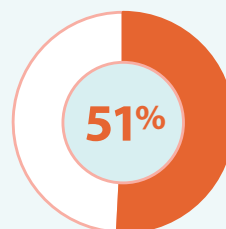


In 2018/19, 24 of 53 Alaska school districts with elementary programs received PEG funding.¹

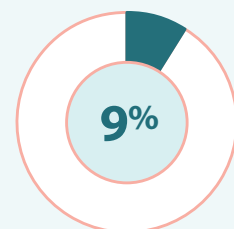
These districts included rural remote districts and urban districts such as Anchorage, which has 36 percent of all kindergarten students in the state.

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



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



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



PEG programs faced several key implementation challenges

Staff recruitment and retention

Six of nine program directors interviewed reported difficulties in hiring and retaining qualified staff members.

Insufficient funding

Seven of nine program directors interviewed said they worried about whether funding was sufficient to continue operating their preschool. All interviewed program directors reported blending PEG funds with other funding sources.

Low enrollment

Seven rural districts noted in interviews that issues with low enrollment made it challenging to secure sufficient program funding, which is provided on a per-pupil basis.

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% vs. 32%

of PEG students were considered kindergarten ready in 2018/19⁴

of non-PEG students were considered kindergarten ready in 2018/19⁵



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.

² Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Public Assistance. (2020). Child care facilities database. Retrieved June 23, 2020, from <https://dpaworks.dhss.alaska.gov/FindProviderVS8/zSearch.aspx>

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.

Read the report: Pierson, A. & Rooney, K. (2021). *State-funded preschool in the last frontier: Alaska’s Pre-Elementary Grant program* (REL 2021–093). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest. Retrieved from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/projects/project.asp?projectID=4630>

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