

Alaska



Background

Alaska Pre-Kindergarten Program

The Alaska Pre-Kindergarten program is a competitive grant that funds part-day pre-K for four-year-olds who meet Head Start income eligibility requirements.¹

The Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (EED) administers the Pre-Kindergarten Program as a competitive grant to districts.² Public school districts that receive pre-K funding may subcontract with faith-based centers, family child care centers, Head Start programs, private child care centers, and charter schools.

Charter schools in Alaska

Alaska allows for start-up and conversion charter schools. Charter schools in Alaska must be approved by both the local school board and the state board of education.³

Process for Accessing Pre-K Funds

Charter schools interested in offering pre-K can only do so if they partner with a school district to submit an application for funding. If the application is successful, funding flows to the school district, then to the charter school as a subcontractor.

School districts must apply for Alaska Pre-Kindergarten Funds through a competitive grant program administered by EED. EED assesses district applications based on multiple factors: the need for the program among the population being served; the quality of program design; parent, family, and community engagement; adequacy of resources; sustainability plan; management plan; program evaluation; previous success or promise of success; and the proposed budget. EED prioritizes applications that create partnerships with community providers or Head Start centers to leverage additional federal, state, or local funding.⁴

For FY 2015, EED estimates that it will award between five and eight school districts two-year grants of between \$50,000 and \$450,000, to serve between eleven and eighty children each. Funding for the program has fluctuated over time and as a result the number of seats has been inconsistent.⁵

Alaska Pre-Kindergarten Program funding serves as start-up funding that ramps down over time. Districts are able to receive additional years of funding, but in order to do so must submit



TOTAL SCORE

26/50

Alaska's climate for charter schools to offer pre-K is **not hospitable**

- + There are no state statutory or regulatory barriers to charter schools accessing state funding for pre-K.
- Compared to K-12 funding levels, low pre-K program funding makes offering pre-K less attractive to charters.
- The size of the pre-K program limits charter access to funding.
- The funding, application, or approval process creates a barrier to charter access.
- + Automatic enrollment from charter pre-K to kindergarten is not prohibited in legislation or practice.



grant proposals that reflect at least a 5 percent deduction in the amount requested or a 50 percent match in funding.⁶

All Alaska Pre-Kindergarten Program providers, including school districts, must be licensed child care providers through the Department of Health and Human Services.

Barriers

Are there any statutory or regulatory barriers to charter schools accessing state funding for pre-K?

+ **No.** Alaska's charter school legislation does not explicitly permit or prohibit charter schools from offering pre-K. In practice, only two charter schools in Alaska offer pre-K: the Alaska Native Cultural Charter School in Anchorage and Tongass School of Arts and Sciences in Ketchikan. These schools do not, however, use Alaska Pre-Kindergarten Program dollars to fund their pre-K programs, but instead use other local, state, and federal funds.

Is the funding level of the state pre-K program a barrier to charter access?

- **Yes.** Low pre-K program funding, compared to K-12 funding levels, makes pre-K less attractive to charters. Alaska does not provide a set per-pupil funding level for state-funded pre-K, but the grant amounts districts receive through the Alaska Pre-Kindergarten Program offer a low amount of funding per child served, even for a half-day program.

Is the size of the state pre-K program a barrier to charter access?

- **Yes.** The size of the program is a barrier to charters accessing state pre-K funds. The program only serves 3 percent of all four-year-olds in the state.

Is the application, approval, and/or funding process a barrier to charter access?

- **Yes.** The application process is a barrier to charter access to state pre-K funding. Charter schools cannot apply for funding directly through the state; they must collaborate with a school district to submit a joint application. Because Alaska charter schools are authorized by local districts, this policy makes the district responsible for both authorizing the charter school to serve pre-K and allocating funds for it to do so, but it provides no recourse for charters if the district elects not to share pre-K funds with them.

Is automatic enrollment from pre-K to kindergarten prohibited in legislation or practice?

+ **No.** The charter law does not explicitly allow or prohibit automatic enrollment from pre-K into kindergarten. The legislation states that charter schools must have a written student recruitment process, including a lottery mechanism in cases of oversubscription. The recruitment process may include priority consideration for certain student populations, if approved by the authorizer. Charter schools may include priority preferences for students enrolled in their pre-K program if their authorizer approves it.

Recommendations

The major barrier to accessing pre-K funds—for both districts and charter schools—is the very small scale of the program itself. If the state chooses to increase the number of pre-K slots, two changes would allow charter schools to more easily offer pre-K:

- Revise the charter school legislation to explicitly permit charter schools to offer pre-K.
- Revise the Pre-Kindergarten Grant application to make charter schools eligible applicants and permit them to apply for funding independent of school districts.



	Alaska Pre-Kindergarten Program	Charter Schools in Alaska
Year created	Launched in 2011 ⁷	Charter law enacted in 1995 ⁸
Children in state	20,049 three- and four-year-olds in Alaska ⁹	152,497 school-age children in Alaska ¹⁰
Children served	345 children served 0 percent of three-year-olds 3 percent of four-year-olds ¹¹	5,980 students served 3.9 percent of school-age population Twenty-seven charter schools ¹²
Charters offering pre-K	Two charter schools in Alaska offer pre-K. ¹³	Twenty charter schools in Alaska offer elementary programs. ¹⁴
Funding	Alaska awards pre-K funds to districts as a flat grant amount, rather than on a per-pupil basis. Currently, districts may receive grants of between \$50,000 and \$450,000 to serve eleven to eighty students.	Charter schools receive \$5,860 per pupil to serve K–12 students. ¹⁵

Endnotes

1 Children must be from families who are at or below 100 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL). If space is available, up to 35 percent of children from families between 100 and 135 percent FPL may enroll in the program.

2 Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, “Opportunity for Pre-Kindergarten Grants,” http://education.alaska.gov/news/releases/2014/opportunity_for_prekinder.pdf.

3 National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS), “Measuring Up: Alaska,” <http://www.publiccharters.org/get-the-facts/law-database/states/AK>.

4 Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, “Request for Applications: Alaska Pre-Kindergarten Program 2015,” April 23, 2014, <http://www.eed.state.ak.us/forms/Preelementary/05-12-039.pdf>, 19-27.

5 Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, “Request for Applications,” 8.

6 Ibid., 9.

7 W. Steven Barnett et al., “The State of Preschool 2013: State Preschool Yearbook” (New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2013), <http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/yearbook2013.pdf>.

8 NAPCS, “Measuring Up: Alaska.”

9 State population data calculated using ACS 2012 five-year estimates; U.S. Census Bureau, “American Community Survey,” www.census.gov/acs.

10 Ibid., all children in households, three to seventeen years old.

11 W. Steven Barnett et al., “The State of Preschool 2013.”

12 NAPCS, “Measuring Up: Alaska.”

13 Alaska Native Cultural Charter School, <http://www.asdk12.org/schools/anccs/pages/>.

14 Alaska Charter Schools Directory, http://education.alaska.gov/alaskan_schools/charter/pdf/charter_school_directory.pdf.

15 Winterberry Charter School, “How Charter Schools are Funded,” February 2013, http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_documents.asp?session=28&docid=20743.