



Alaska State Legislature

Representative Kawasaki

HB 52: Alaska Voluntary Pre-Elementary Education Act

Sponsor Statement

Alaska remains one of the only states that does not provide pre-kindergarten education to its children on a statewide basis. HB 52 seeks to add Alaska to the ranks of the majority of states that have recognized the need to properly invest in our children's future.

Children who benefit from early education earn higher incomes as adults, enter the job market in much larger numbers, are more likely to obtain a college education, remain off of public assistance and stay out of prison. A report published by the National Center for Education Statistics found that 53 percent of prison inmates are either illiterate or have a very low literacy level. Children who enroll in early education programs have a much higher literacy rate than those who do not.

Alaska has a responsibility to provide the best education possible for its children. Currently, outside of a few school district classrooms, the state only provides early education through the Head Start program, which is only available to low-income children and which is chronically underfunded. Due to lack of funding, the Alaska Head Start Association estimates that more than 50 percent of children who qualify cannot receive Head Start education. Providing additional opportunities is a crucial stepping stone to improving the future of young Alaskans.

Extensive research shows that a child's intellectual development is especially important before age 6. A study by the National Institute for Early Education in 2004 found that children who attended state-funded pre-Kindergarten programs showed improvements in vocabulary 31 percent greater than other children, and 44 percent greater in math. Young children who receive high quality early education do better academically, show behavioral improvements in school, and are more likely to stay in school, graduate, and go on to complete post-secondary education.

There is also a significant economic impact of providing early education. Multiple studies have shown that funds invested in early education pay substantial dividends in the long run. Every dollar invested in high-quality pre-K programs save taxpayers up to \$7 long-term. Pre-K saves money by reducing the need for remedial and special education, welfare programs, and criminal justice services. An ongoing study of 40 year-old adults in Michigan who participated in the 1962 Perry Preschool project found that adults with pre-K were more likely to be employed and earned 33 percent higher average incomes than their peers who did not have state-funded early education.

Additionally, a study prepared for the SEED program at the University of Alaska Southeast state that 87 percent of Alaska residents think it is important for state government to provide financial support for early education and childcare. It's time to start thinking long-term and ensuring a prosperous future for all of Alaska's children.