

Kids these days

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The publication for people who care about Alaska's Kids!

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New Program Highlights Early Childhood Learning

By Gene Storm

Thirty years of research confirms that family involvement is a powerful influence on children's achievement in school (Ziegler, 1987). When families are involved in their children's education, children earn higher grades and receive higher scores on tests, attend school more regularly, complete more homework, demonstrate more positive attitudes and behaviors, graduate from high school at higher rates, and are more likely to enroll in higher education than students with less involved families. For these reasons, increasing family involvement in the education of Alaska's children is an important goal for our schools and communities.



system-wide changes to improve pre-Kindergarten learning. In addition to emphasizing the learning benefits for our children, *Ready to Read, Ready to Learn* and other organizations promoting early intervention in childhood education produce statewide economic benefits.

Early childhood education programs are seldom portrayed as economic development opportunities. Credible studies, however, show that the value of public investment in the first five years of a child's life has a better return on investment for society than anytime thereafter. One well-known study (High Scope/Perry Preschool study) conducted over a 40-year period, indicated a return of \$7 for each \$1 invested in high quality early learning experiences. The investment sets children up for success in school, work and life.

Some common conclusions from current studies include:

- Lower crime rates;
- Lower teenage pregnancy and welfare dependency rates;
- Lower job training costs;
- Lower special education costs and lower grade repetition;
- Higher success in school and higher graduation rates;
- Higher workforce readiness and job productivity.

Study after study shows a clear correlation between early childhood education and economic and social gains. Currently, Alaska has no statewide program that defines and supports quality early child (pre-K) education. We are, in fact, one of only 12 states

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Supporting your children's journey in education as they grow is crucial to their academic success and initiating a connection to literacy early on is also critical. Children are born learning, and through emerging programs like Alaska's *Ready to Read, Ready to Learn* initiative, early childhood literacy is receiving more focus statewide.

Ready to Read, Ready to Learn is a comprehensive coalition of industry leaders, policy makers, educators, parents and families dedicated to creating

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10 Ways to Keep the Kids Engaged, Out and About



By Suey Linzmeier, AEYC-SEA

A short list of ideas for parents and caregivers to get kids engaged in the great outdoors!

1. Driving to your destination, play *I Spy*.
2. On a hike, allow everyone to run ahead and safely wait for the entire group at a specific destination (ex: the next park bench or log).
3. Sing *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* and personalize it to your adventure.
4. Bring a tent and play camping at your destination.
5. Have a collection theme for the day: smooth beach glass, mussel shells, sticks shaped like letters, rocks shaped like hearts.
6. Assign partners or fieldtrip friends for each person to be responsible for throughout the day.
7. Bring a few props for open-ended experiences: chalk to the playground, spoons to the beach, magnifying glasses to the rocks, rope or twine into the forest, toy animals to a meadow.
8. Move back and forth across park, beach, or trail as lions, dinosaurs, helicopters, or crabs.
9. Have a scavenger hunt.
10. Count as many "matching tourists" as you can find!

37 Alaskan Youth Decide to Change their World!

Adapted from Alaska PYLI news release



The 9th annual Alaska Points of Light Youth Leadership Institute (PYLI) was conducted June 16-20, 2006. Thirty-seven Alaskan youth ages 13-21 attended the institute to develop skills and knowledge in the areas of personal and group leadership, community assessment, diversity, goal-setting, team building, project-planning, and service-learning.

Students from Anchorage, Palmer, Wasilla, Kenai, Soldotna, and Kodiak participated in the five-day training. The last day of the PYLI was spent organizing and preparing for two service projects held on Tuesday, June 20. PYLI students worked in service teams for two hours under the direction of Anchorage Parks & Recreation Volunteer Coordinator, Nancy Beardsley, to revitalize David Green Park through cleaning and greening activities in the playground areas, flowerbeds, picnic shelter, parking lots, and other public areas. In the afternoon, PYLI students walked to the Northern Lights School where Camp Providence conducts its day camp for 120 children. Camp Coordinator Anita Leamy directed PYLI students to engage children in teamwork and trust-building activities designed to help them have fun while learning to work cooperatively with others.

Although the nine PYLI graduate assistants and 28 PYLI student participants completed the 50-hour community leadership and service-training institute, they will not "officially" graduate. This honor is reserved for October 28, National Make a Difference Day, pending student completion of 10 hours of volunteer service in their local schools and communities during the month of September.

Alaska PYLI supports the national Prudential Spirit of Community Initiative which is a national strategy to help rekindle America's community spirit by encouraging young people to become actively involved in making their communities better places to live. Alaska PYLI is committed to providing youth with the encouragement, peer networks and leadership skills necessary to make meaningful contributions to their communities and begin a life-long journey of leadership and service.

For more information on the 9 year old Alaska Points of Light Youth Leadership Institute program which has now trained more than 600 Alaskan youth and adults, please call 561-6630 and visit www.PYLI.org.



Produced by:

The Association of Alaska School Boards
1111 West 9th Street, Juneau AK 99801
(907) 586-1083
Fax: (907) 586-2995
E-mail: aasb@aasb.org
Web: www.kidsthesedays.org

Editors: Ryan Aguilar, John Greely

Designer: Stacey Poulson

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Reading to your Kids

By AASB Staff



Numerous research projects underscore the importance of early childhood education as a cornerstone of lifelong learning. It is in these early, formative years (birth - age 4) when children learn more and at a faster pace than at any other time in life.

Parents, as a child's first and most important teachers, play a critical role in cultivating and nurturing the concepts of early learning and emergent literacy. Through experiences such as reading together, parents can shape their child's future, and begin to lay a foundation for their academic and social success in life. Children's cognitive skills before they enter kindergarten show strong associations with achievement in elementary and high school and during early adulthood. - Shonkoff, J.P. &

Phillips, D.A. (Ed). (2000).

Reading aloud to babies, toddlers, and preschoolers develops language skills and increases vocabulary, enhances critical thinking and creativity, nurtures emotional growth and self-confidence, creates independent learners and problem solvers, and most importantly, cultivates a passion for reading. By using enthusiasm, smiles, giggles, praise, playfulness, and conversation about the story and the pictures during storybook interactions, parents can make the experience more enjoyable and fun – and therefore more beneficial - for both the child and themselves.

In addition, parents can model literacy

behaviors for their children by reading the newspaper and books, and by writing letters and grocery lists. If parents demonstrate the pleasure of reading and writing, children will learn to enjoy them, too.

By reading to infants, parents can help their children develop an understanding about print at an early age as infants learn to make connections between words and meaning (*NAEYC, 1997*). By engaging children at an early age in reading and allowing children to observe those around them engaged in reading and writing activities, parents can help foster a lifelong passion for literacy and learning that leads to benefits in all areas of development as the children grow into adolescence and adulthood.

The Invisibles Among us

By Kathy Buss



Among us are those people we often don't "see" because of our own bias, feelings and conditioning. When we think of the invisibles among us it is often with compassion, for we are thinking of the homeless, the hungry, the mentally ill, the incarcerated, the addicted, the shut ins, the Hospice clients, just to name a few. Many of us are so blessed and have never struggled with any of this.

But there is another invisible that we have all been and are still making invisible: our youth. Our children depend on us for everything - their health, their nutrition, their security. For all of this, they look to us with trust, hope and expectation. We are talking of love of the child, which is where love and peace must begin. But often we are so busy we have no time for the children. So children go to the streets and get involved in drugs or other things. These are the things that break peace. The children hurt because they are forgotten, because there is no one in the family to receive them.

Let us bring the child back. The child is a gift to the family. Each child is created for greater things - to love and to be loved. We must bring the child back to the center of our care and concern. This is the only way that our world can survive because our children are the only hope for the future. Only children can take our places. We need to actively seek and embrace youth to be with us.

This is how easy it is: I work with a wonderful woman who is very kind and very shy. It would not be her nature to start a conversation with anyone who gives the non-verbal signals of "stay away, I am invisible."

At the end of her street there is a bus stop she drives past daily on her way to work. At the shelter, every day, stands a group of middle school youth with their heads down, hair hiding their faces, dressed in dark clothing.

One day as she drove by and one of the girls glanced up, she spontaneously waved. No response. The next day she did the same with

much the same reaction. On day three, her wave was acknowledged by a fleeting glance from the girl and eyes lifted from the boys. By day five they began to return the wave.

Within the month the group waited every morning watching for the approach of her car getting their enthusiastic waves ready for a woman who had never spoken a word to them. The youth were no longer invisible and began to behave differently.

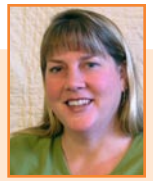
It is as simple as waving, saying hello or looking children and youth in the eye and yet we seem to not be able to manage it.

What would our world look like if we always made youth our #1 priority - ahead of oil, ahead of politics, ahead of wealth and ahead of ourselves? More importantly, what would our future look like if every child everywhere were valued and never, ever invisible?

Until that time, each and every one of us can wave, and uncover another invisible among us.

Residence Life Staff Create Better Environment

By Timi Tullis



Each year, near the end of August, new and returning students fill the halls of the three statewide residential high schools for the beginning of school. These campuses are where they will spend the better part of their nine-month school year, 24 hours a day. In classrooms at Mt. Edgecumbe, Galena, and Nenana schools, instructors and administrative staff encourage academic success and mold students' budding, young minds. What about the 8+ hours outside of the classroom? Who is there to offer social and emotional guidance, support, and balance to the lives of students outside of class?

The Resiliency in Residence Life staff, that's who.

In 2001, the Galena School District in interior Alaska began the Resiliency in Residence Life project. With a grant from Funds for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE), the project that included six student residential settings at its inception is now comprised of the three statewide institutions of Mt. Edgecumbe, Galena, and Nenana. Under the Resiliency in Residence Life project, a group of nine professional housing personnel have made it their mission to nurture positive, supportive, and encouraging housing environments in Alaska's residential schools. These caring school climates directly correlate with the significant increase

in retention rates and quality of life of students attending these residential high schools.

STUDENT RETENTION RATES AT GALENA ROSE FROM ABOUT 30% TO OVER 85% AFTER TRAINED RESIDENCE LIFE STAFF CAME ON BOARD.

To learn community-building techniques and create these encouraging atmospheres, Resiliency in Residence Life staff undergo a one-week training session each year, at the beginning of August. The training covers topics that will help staff work with the teenagers such as: cross-cultural understanding, overcoming homesickness, preparing for emergency situations, learning how to better communicate with parents, and planning fun, engaging activities. Every

aspect of the training is tied together through the employment of the Developmental Assets Framework™, a meaningful model based on research from the Search Institute for creating healthier communities in which to raise kids.

The Resiliency in Residence Life Project is heading into its sixth and final year. This year's training took place August 7 – 11 at the University of Alaska's Southeast campus in Juneau. Feedback from staff on this training session was extremely positive. Staff comments included:

- "I listen better to my students."
- "I was able to come up with an intentional structured program incorporating assets on a daily basis."
- "I took the initiative to build existing, and cultivate new, relationships with people in the community, getting as many involved in the school as possible."

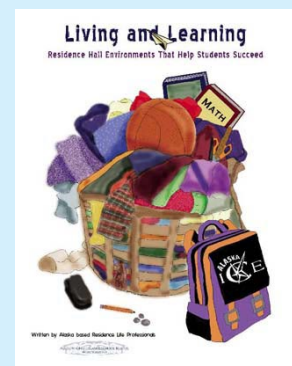


Residence Life staff engage in a team-building activity at the 2005 training.

As we head into our last year of the project it is my hope that we have laid the foundation of what great residential programs can look like. I hope that in the future each residential school will continue to have training for their staff and keep up on issues current to the students we serve. Any training that is given to the staff members will help ensure safe, loving and supportive living communities for all the youth living in the halls.

Galena School District's Resiliency in Residence Life project has teamed up with AASB/Alaska ICE to publish *Living and Learning – Residence Hall Environments that Help Students Succeed*, a residence life workbook targeting high school and college campus life that outlines numerous activities and ideas for engaging youth and fostering a positive school climate aligned with the Developmental Assets Framework.

Get your copy at www.alaskaice.org/store or call (907) 586-1083.



Jumpstart's Read for the Record

On August 24, tens of thousands of adults and children set the record for the largest shared reading experience ever as part of Jumpstart's Read for the Record Campaign. This Campaign aims to help all children thrive by raising awareness about the early education crisis, providing effective tools to address this crisis, and engaging adults in the early learning experiences that put children on a course for success in school and life.

"Early learning experiences are crucial to the growth and development of young children," said Rob Waldron, President and CEO of Jumpstart. "Jumpstart's Read for the Record provides opportunities for everyone in the United States to support quality early education and to engage in the powerful learning experiences that Jumpstart models in its classrooms every day."

Jumpstart, a non-profit organization, sponsored "Read for the Record" Day across the country, using *The Little Engine That Could* for this year's event. Learn more about the Jumpstart initiative at www.readfortherecord.org.



New Program Highlights Early Childhood Learning

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without such a program. The *Ready to Read, Ready to Learn* Alaska initiative strives to build public awareness and support of quality early child (pre-K) education through the organization and empowerment of a collective task force aimed at developing a statewide approach to pre-K education. First Lady Nancy Murkowski chairs the task force which includes members such as: Roger Sampson, commissioner of Alaska Dept. of Education and Early Development; Byron Mallott, Senior Fellow of First Alaskans Institute; Sue Hull, school board member in Fairbanks; Edna MacLean, president Emeritus, Ilisagvik College; among others.

The Governor has charged the task force with coming up with specific recommendations regarding pre-K learning. A formal report will be released by the task force within the next few weeks.

For more information on Alaska's *Ready to Read, Ready to Learn* Initiative, visit the Alaska Humanities Forum web site: www.akhf.org.

New Relationships at the Beginning of School

By Diane Sly



So many new relationships! Your child must figure out how to fit into this new group. The teacher must figure out how to create a classroom community out of so many individuals. Parents must learn to trust the system to care for and educate their child.

It is this last relationship that I want to talk about now that school is beginning again. If a teacher wants parent involvement in their classroom, the first step is to develop a trusting relationship with each child's parent or guardian—often former students in the system that did not have good experiences with school.

It's good to approach this new relationship informally using potluck suppers, home visits, check-in times when the child is arriving or leaving, notes or phone calls to parents, an after school open-door policy.

The next step is to extend an invitation for the parent to become a partner in identifying ways to help a child be successful. Start up collaborative conversations about reading, writing, homework, friendships—show parents that you are interested and know that they are vitally interested in the happiness of their child.

These two positive steps will lay the basis for future problem solving throughout the year. Teachers will have relationships with parents and be able to call on them for help. Parents will understand that the teacher really cares about the success of their child in school and out of school too. A positive partnership will form resulting in a good working relationship. It's a new beginning.