

State of Alaska
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES

Frank H. Murkowski, Governor

Karleen Jackson
Commissioner
P.O. Box 110601
Juneau, Alaska 99811-0601
NEWS RELEASE



Sherry Hill
Communications Officer
/Legislative Liaison
907-465-1618
FAX: 907-465-3068
www.hss.state.ak.us

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: November 10, 2005

Contact: Sherry Hill, (907) 465-1618, Cell (907) 321-2838
Jeff Kasper, (907) 465-8194, Cell (907) 321-3158

First Lady Nancy Murkowski announces Governor's proposal to improve early childhood literacy and learning

Ready to Read, Ready to Learn Task Force sets goals at initial meeting

(Anchorage, Alaska) – Governor Frank H. Murkowski will ask the Alaska Legislature to provide \$750,000 in fiscal year 2007 to improve childhood literacy and learning, First Lady Nancy Murkowski announced today at the Ready to Read, Ready to Learn Task Force.

The Department of Health & Social Services) and the Department of Education & Early Development will use the funds to carry out recommendations being developed by the task force, which met today at the UAA/APU Consortium Library in Anchorage.

“Our children are born ready to learn; we just need to be there for them at the right time to make sure they have every opportunity to realize their potential,” First Lady Nancy Murkowski said. “This task force and funding proposal will be important steps toward creating a comprehensive effort throughout Alaska to support quality early childhood literacy.”

The funding request will be included in the budget of the Department of Health & Social Services, which has the primary responsibility for children from birth to age 5 through infant learning programs, child care, and public health.

“Alaska needs a statewide effort to invest in high-quality early childhood literacy for our pre-kindergarten children,” DHSS Commissioner Karleen Jackson said. “We need to promote partnerships among state and local education agencies, early childhood educators and community-based programs to expand preschool opportunities for 3- and 4-year-olds. Those are the most critical years in a child’s vocabulary development which impacts later success in reading and writing.”

“Alaska would gain a tremendous benefit from a broader scope of high-quality preschool opportunities that help students successfully transition to kindergarten,” said Education Commissioner Roger Sampson.

- more -

The task force, which will meet monthly from January through May 2006, is developing a comprehensive strategy to address improving early childhood learning and literacy in Alaska, as well as raising the public's awareness of the issue.

Funding for the task force comes primarily from the Alaska Humanities Forum, with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities, The Rasmuson Foundation, The CIRI Foundation, United Way of Anchorage and Child Care Connection.

In May 2005, Governor Murkowski called for the task force and charged it with identifying ways tAlaskans can improve the readiness of preschoolers to read and learn; families can become better at teaching children to listen, speak, read and write; preschools and childcare centers can provide the best possible start for children; the business community can do its part; and state and local governments can support the effort.