

a campaign of the
Pew Center on the States

News Release

For Immediate Release

Contact: Holly Barnes Higgins, 202.862.9863, hhiggins@pewtrusts.org
Liz Snyder, 202.552.2057, esnyder@pewtrusts.org

Pew Report: Despite Economic Crisis, Alaska Governor is One of Three Proposing First-Time Investments in Pre-Kindergarten

Palin budget puts state on course to join national movement toward voluntary pre-k, but questions remain about quality

WASHINGTON, DC—(May 5, 2009)— Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin is one of three governors proposing new pre-kindergarten initiatives in their FY10 budgets, according to a state-by-state analysis released today by Pre-K Now, a campaign of the Pew Center on the States.

“For the first time, Alaska stands out for true leadership on pre-k,” said Danielle M. Gonzales, project manager of Pre-K Now. “Governor Palin’s early education proposal is an important step toward providing families the opportunities they need to help their children start school ready to learn and succeed. However, the governor will need to continue to champion this issue and ensure that any new funds are directed only to a research-based, high-quality program.”

The non-partisan annual report, “Leadership Matters: Governors’ Pre-K Budget Proposals Fiscal Year 2010,” evaluates budget proposals for the next year and governors’ remarks in recent state of the state addresses to determine which leaders count voluntary, high-quality pre-k among their top education and economic development strategies. The findings underscore a growing interest among federal and state policy makers in targeting limited public resources to effective programs backed by research. This year’s report also addresses federal action, such as the Obama administration’s inclusion of funding proposals for early education in the stimulus package.

Even as they confront significant economic challenges and whittle spending to core priorities, the majority of the nation’s governors are increasing or protecting state investments in pre-k programs in the coming fiscal year.

The report spotlights Gov. Palin’s recommendation of a \$2 million state investment in a new pre-k pilot initiative for 4-year-olds. Recently approved by the state legislature, the pilot is the first state-funded pre-k program in Alaska. In contrast, governors in nine other states without

state-funded pre-k chose not to invest in evidence-based early education programs, decisions that limit parents' choices and diminish young children's chances to start school ready to succeed.

Key findings include:

- Fourteen governors are proposing to increase investment in early education.
- Thirteen governors are proposing to “flat-fund” early education programs, preserving current investment levels.
- In addition to Gov. Palin, the governors of North Dakota and Rhode Island – states that also do not currently provide state-funded pre-k – are proposing new pre-k initiatives.
- The governors of Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina and South Carolina proposed a cut in pre-k investments.
- Total proposed state investment in pre-k is four percent greater than FY09 appropriations (which were \$5.2 billion in 43 states and the District of Columbia).
- If passed, these proposals would bring total state pre-k funding to \$5.4 billion in 43 states and the District of Columbia for FY10.
- Facing one of the biggest budget shortfalls in the country, New Jersey Governor Jon Corzine is calling for a 14 percent increase in pre-k investment, including the creation of an “incentive fund” to encourage school districts' use of federal recovery funds to expand pre-k.

Pre-k is one of the most well-researched public education strategies of the last forty years. The preponderance of evidence shows quality early education helps children succeed in school and in life, and results in savings for every dollar invested. Children who complete quality pre-k programs enter school more prepared cognitively and socially, are less likely to be held back or need special education services, are more likely to complete high school, and become more successful and productive adults.

To view a copy of the report and learn more about the early education initiatives of the Pew Center on the States, please visit www.preknow.org or www.pewcenteronthestates.org.

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The Pew Center on the States identifies and advances state policy solutions. Pre-K Now, a campaign of the Pew Center on the States, collaborates with advocates and policymakers to lead a movement toward high-quality, voluntary pre-kindergarten for all three and four year olds.