

Executive Summary

Sealaska Heritage Institute promotes early literacy, language development, and school readiness for Alaska Native children from birth through 5 years of age through the Baby Raven Reads (BRR) program. This program began in Juneau in 2014-15 and has since expanded to communities throughout Southeast Alaska. After operating for six years in Juneau, program assessments provide enough data to evaluate the program's impact on participants' literacy and kindergarten readiness.

Closing the Achievement Gap

Findings by McKinley Research Group show significant progress in early literacy skills among Baby Raven Reads participants. Since the program began, Alaska Native student scores have improved significantly in all areas, while scores for all other students have remained relatively static.

These findings are based on:

- Changes from 2014-15 to 2019-20 in Alaska Native scores in the State's Alaska Developmental Profile (ADP), which measures 13 skills to assess a child's kindergarten-readiness.
- Data from two annual assessments that BRR conducts to track participant progress.

Assessments show increases in the following skills areas among BRR participants:

- **Phonetic Knowledge:** The number of Alaska Native students consistently demonstrating phonetic awareness increased by 20% between 2014-15 and 2019-20. During this time, the proportion of non-Alaska Native students consistently demonstrating phonetic knowledge decreased by 5%.
- **Awareness of Print Concepts:** In 2019-20, 33% of Alaska Native students consistently demonstrated awareness of print concepts, an increase of 6% since 2014-2015. During that period, scores for non-Alaska Native students decreased by 4%.
- **Knowledge of Letters and Symbols:** In 2019-20, 39% of Alaska Native students consistently demonstrated alphabet knowledge, an increase of 10%. Non-Alaska Native students decreased by 1% during the same period.

Since 2017-18, assessment results show an increase by 8% to 26% in all eight skills and behaviors monitored in the BBR program. This includes the following among BBR participants:

- **A 26% increase in** the frequency with which children ask to be read to.
- **A 20% increase in** using words and gestures appropriately.
- **An 18% increase in** recognition of letters and symbols.

Among early learning programs, Baby Raven Reads has the largest reach to Alaska Native children in Juneau. In 2020, BRR enrollment totaled 150, nearly one-quarter of the entire population of Alaska Native children in this age group in Juneau. A review of programs to identify potential contributors to the disproportionately large increase in ADP scores among Alaska Native children in Juneau suggests that few programs other than Baby Raven Reads played a significant role in increasing kindergarten readiness in this population.