

# BRISTOL BAY NATIVE ASSOCIATION

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3/14/2025

To: DCSD School Board Members,

Tribal Councils  
Served by BBNA:

Aleknagik  
Chignik Bay  
Chignik Lagoon  
Chignik Lake  
Clarks Point  
Curyung  
Egegik  
Ekuk  
Ekwok  
Igiugig  
Iliamna  
Ivanof Bay  
Kanatak  
King Salmon  
Kokhanok  
Koliganek  
Levelock  
Manokotak  
Naknek  
New Stuyahok  
Newhalen  
Nondalton  
Pedro Bay  
Perryville  
Pilot Point  
Port Heiden  
Portage Creek  
South Naknek  
Togiak  
Twin Hills  
Ugashik

I wanted to take a moment to update you on the current situation of the BBNA Head Start program and make you aware of the impact of your approval to open a competing pre-k program in Dillingham. My concern is that with two competing programs operating in our small community, the Head Start program will either lose funding or lose one of the two Dillingham Head Start classrooms, neither of which will be beneficial to students or families in our community. I clearly want to avoid that outcome, and I hope you agree.

BBNA has had a long history of collaboration with DCSD, starting with the grant funded state licensed Infant Toddler Learning Center (ITLC), which opened in the Family Resource Center back in 2003. That program was designed to give High School aged parents some practical hands-on parenting skills while having access to full day childcare for their children. This allowed students to complete their High School diploma and gain job experience simultaneously. After the grant to DCSD ended, BBNA picked up management and oversight of the infant toddler room, then expanded over the years to include a pre-school classroom and eventually, after school care. As an additional bonus, Maximum Achievement Program students had paid workplace assignments in the childcare and Head Start classrooms for many years.

In 2012, BBNA and DCSD launched a collaborative pre-k program. For two years, there were certified teachers from DCSD placed in (back then) all three Head Start classrooms, BBNA paid a portion of the teacher's salaries provided two teacher's aides in each classroom, and bus and meal services. These students arrived to kindergarten with solid pre-k skills, and are now high school juniors and sophomores, most of whom are excelling academically. This was such a positive experience that BBNA created the same model in our three SWRSD sites starting in 2018.

One of Head Start's approximately 2000 requirements, is that all teachers must have a minimum of an AA and be working towards a BA. The district collaborations have helped us meet that requirement since BBNA lacks the ability to recruit certified teachers or access the state Teacher Retirement System.

Since the pandemic, Head Start programs across the nation have struggled to keep classrooms staffed and maintain full enrollment, and BBNA is no different and has struggled to maintain full enrollment. In May of 2023, BBNA received a letter from the Office of Head Start stating that we had 1 year to come into compliance by being fully enrolled or lose nearly \$600,000 in funding (approximately 1/3 of our HS grant). We managed to meet the requirements by May of 2024 and the threat was lifted.

Over the summer of 2022, I learned of DCSD's plan to open their own pre-school program under the PACE grant, via Facebook. I contacted Superintendent Brower and explained that there weren't enough students to fully enroll both programs. I gave her a brief history of the collaborations over the years and explained that we can provide better services for students and families if we work together, similarly to BBNA's current existing collaboration with SWRSD and to the previous pre-k collaboration with DCSD back in 2012. At that point DCSD started the process of amending the PACE to work collaboratively with BBNA rather than start their own program. DCSD had a teacher in place shortly after the 22-23 school year started but, she decided that Dillingham wasn't a good fit for her. Liz Clark finished out the 2022-2023 school year as the DCSD Head Start teacher and continued the position through the 23-24 school year.

For the 24-25 school year, DCSD moved Liz to a position in the elementary school. DCSD had wanted to have full day/ full week pre-k services, so in the grant, they committed 2 full-time certified teachers and 2 full-time aides, but it quickly became apparent that neither DCSD nor BBNA could recruit enough staff to make that plan a reality. We started the 24-25 school year with one DCSD Teacher, one DCSD Aide, and 2 BBNA Aides, enough to provide part day full week services to students. Early after the start of the school year, both the DCSD Aide and one of the BBNA aides decided to seek other employment. BBNA provided a rotation of substitutes while we searched for a permanent replacement for the BBNA aide. DCSD did not provide another aide nor any subs.

The situation escalated when the DCSD teacher mentioned that she was being kicked and punched by the students. At that point, (10/3/24), to ensure the safety of the teacher and students in the classroom, I immediately reached out to DCSD requesting a replacement aide or at least a regular substitute.

I expected a quick response but heard nothing from DCSD until BBNA's interim CEO received a letter from on 10/22/24 stating DCSD's intent to cancel the current MOA and move their current teacher to elementary school to start their own pre-k program. I was never contacted by anyone at DCSD after I sent the email requesting additional DCSD staff.

In November 2024, Kate Berkoski stepped in to teach while we were recruiting for a new teacher. She has committed to finish out the school year as the teacher, however, she is Head Start's Education and Disabilities Manager, so this is not a viable long-term solution.

The DCSD pre-k program opened in January of 2025, and 7 students moved from Head Start to DCSD's program, this put BBNA again into an under-enrollment situation. The loss of \$600,000 of federal funding would result in the closure of at least 2 of BBNA's 5 Head Start classrooms. To avoid closure, loss of funds and staff layoffs, we are in conversation with Bristol Bay Borough School District to open a program in Naknek. Sadly, this will require the closure of one of the two Dillingham Head Start classrooms.

Once slots are moved from a community, it is unlikely that they will ever return. It is clearly better to reduce services in one community, to save classrooms in other communities. It is better still if local entities can work together to provide comprehensive quality services for our children and families.

Looking ahead, when the PACE funding ends, DCSD will need to figure out a way to provide pre-k services for students no longer able to enroll in Head Start. Dillingham currently has 11 students for the kindergarten class starting fall of 2025. For the 2025-2026 school year, our data shows 32 pre-k students. Census data and our database show as many as 36 pre-k students for the 26-27 school year. The PACE grant ends on 9/30/26, so I sincerely hope that DCSD has a plan to seek additional funding to continue pre-k services after that date.

This is a complex issue with a lot of moving parts, and merits further discussion for clarity.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or if you want to set up a time to discuss this further.

Thank you,



Anne Shade

Bristol Bay Native Association

Child Development Department Director