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**COVID-proof Early Education Option for Alaska families**

**July 31, 2020 (Anchorage, AK)** – With the current COVID-19 crisis bringing many traditional early education options to a halt, parents across the nation are scrambling to find a way to keep their preschool-aged children educated and entertained. The good news is, families in Alaska now have an at-home option that costs nothing and is a proven way to get their children ready for kindergarten. Thanks to generous donations made through the TED Organization, [Waterford.org](https://www.waterford.org/) is bringing the [Waterford Upstart](https://www.waterfordupstart.org/) program to Alaska.

Each year, 2.2 million four-year-old children in the United States do not have access to publicly funded early education and more than half are low-income children with no early education options at all. Waterford is one of 8 nonprofit organizations in the world named a [2019 TED Audacious Project](https://audaciousproject.org/ideas/2019/upstart-project). As a part of this recognition, the organization was tasked with reaching more four-year-olds in need, including 200 children in Alaska.

Waterford UPSTART is an in-home, early education program that helps unserved and underserved families. Parents are given the tools they need to become their child’s first and most influential teacher, including a computer and internet access at no cost. The program provides positive parent-child interactions while delivering personalized, online instruction 15 minutes a day, 5 days a week. Parents are also given support through a personal coach and tips to continue engaging their children offline. On average, 92% of children who participate in Waterford UPSTART are ready for kindergarten—compared to a 65% average nationwide and 48% for low-income children.

“When a child begins school behind his or her peers, it’s very hard to catch up. It’s even harder for children from low-income families or whose native language is not English,” said Claudia Miner, Waterford UPSTART executive director. “We want to help these children prepare for school at home with their parents, so they have the ability to walk into their first day of class confident and ready to learn.”

Registration for Waterford UPSTART is now open, but spots are limited and restrictions apply. *Children must enter Kindergarten in Fall 2021.* Parents can register right now for this at-home, no-cost project by logging on to [WaterfordUPSTART.org](http://www.waterfordupstart.org/).

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**Waterford.org**

Waterford.org is an early education nonprofit with a mission to achieve universal literacy for children through equity, access, and parent empowerment. Waterford develops educational tools that guide students along adaptive, individualized learning paths toward fluent reading and lifelong learning. We empower parents as a child’s first teacher, and we support teachers in taking the right actions at the right time for their students. In total, Waterford.org serves more than 300,000 children every year through all of our programs, and that number is continually growing.

**Waterford UPSTART**

Waterford UPSTART helps four-year-old children prepare for school at home and at no cost. Children develop foundational reading and social-emotional skills, and parents are empowered to become their child’s first and most influential teachers. The children use adaptive software just 15 minutes a day, five days a week in the year before they start school. Waterford UPSTART also fuels family involvement in their child’s early education through parent coaches and fun educational activities parents can complete with their children offline. Waterford UPSTART has been rigorously tested and proven, earning the program a [federal EIR grant](https://www.waterford.org/news/waterford-wins-eir-grant-to-bring-waterford-upstart-to-five-states/) and the title of a [TED Audacious project](https://audaciousproject.org/ideas/2019/upstart-project). [Independent research shows](https://www.waterford.org/research/) the average Waterford UPSTART graduate enters kindergarten reading at nearly a first-grade level and maintains those gains through the fourth grade.