



## CORE MESSAGE

The earliest experiences that our children have set the stage for their entire lives. We build a stronger workforce full of talented innovators and inspiring leaders when we prioritize young children and families. We'll lay the groundwork for a stronger state and economy when every child in Montana can reach their full potential.

## TALKING POINTS

- Less than half, 49.5% of children under age 6 with all parents working can be served by licensed child care in Montana. These hardworking parents need access to quality programs for their children in order to continue providing for their families.
- Quality early learning and literacy programs can enhance school readiness and future educational achievement, lead to greater employment and earnings as an adult, and improve health throughout life.
- Too many children can't read by the end of third grade, which is known to be a predictor of lifelong struggles.
- Third grade reading ability is one of the best predictors of high school graduation.
- In the 2021-22 academic year, fewer than half of Montana students were reading at or above grade level, at 46.1 percent.
- 1 in 3 children start kindergarten without the language skills needed to learn to read.
- By 3 years of age there is a 30 million word gap between children of the wealthiest and poorest families.
- Language and literacy development begins at birth, and literacy gaps appear in children well before they enter kindergarten.
- 62% of parents in Montana report missing work because of a lack of child care.
- 42% of Montana businesses say they have a difficult time recruiting and retaining a qualified workforce due to lack of child care options.
- Montana's annual economic loss because of a lack of access to child care totals more than \$90 million.

**Citation:**

<https://gems.opi.mt.gov/student-data>

<https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data#MT/2/0/char/0>

<https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/early-childhood/early-childhood-health-and-development/early-literacy/>