



EARLY LEARNING & LITERACY IN MONTANA



ZEROTOFIVE
MONTANA

One of the best ways to set children up for success in school and life is through early learning and literacy.

Children's brains rapidly develop during their first five years of life, making exposure to quality early learning essential. Literacy gaps appear in children well before they enter kindergarten, yet 1 in 3 kids will enter school without those skills. [1]

Reading proficiently by the end of third grade is a crucial marker in a child's educational development and is a predictor of later life outcomes. Children who read proficiently are 96 percent more likely to graduate high school. [2] In addition to earning 50 to 100 percent more than non-graduates, a high school graduate provides a \$127,000 return, is less likely to be imprisoned, and is more likely to lead a healthier life. [3]

What is early literacy?

Children start learning to read long before they enter school. In fact, the foundational skills of learning and literacy begin right from birth. When young children sing, play, talk, and read with adults, they are building important literacy and language development skills. Exposure to literacy skills before the age 5, the most important stage of brain development, has life-long impacts.

61%

PERCENT OF MONTANA'S YOUNG CHILDREN ARE NOT ENROLLED IN ANY TYPE OF EARLY LEARNING OR SCHOOL READINESS PROGRAM [4]

MONTANA IS

1 of 4

STATES WITHOUT STATE FUNDING FOR EARLY LEARNING AND LITERACY [5]

UP TO
\$16

RETURN FOR EVERY \$1 SPENT. CHILDREN ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE READY FOR SCHOOL, ATTEND COLLEGE, AND HAVE HIGHER EARNING POTENTIAL [6]

ONLY
34%

OF MONTANA FOURTH GRADERS ARE READING AT OR ABOVE GRADE LEVEL. THAT MEANS MORE THAN 65 PERCENT OF STUDENTS ARE NOT MEETING A CRUCIAL MARKER [7]

Why is Early Literacy & Reading so important?

As a child prepares to enter school, more formal early literacy introduction occurs, such as working with letter sounds and language comprehension. However, gaps in literacy skills appear well before children enter kindergarten. By 3 years of age, there is a 30 million word gap between children of the wealthiest and poorest families. [8]

By the time a child is in kindergarten, depending on their family's socioeconomic status, they may be as far as two years behind their peers in crucial skills. [9] Effective early literacy learning opportunities and family skill-building strategies for young kids can help address this gap.

Third grade reading level is a crucial marker for a child's long-term success in school and throughout life. Before third grade, children are learning to read, but after third grade, children are reading to learn. When children do not meet third grade reading levels, they are at risk of falling behind and are less likely to graduate from high school, further their education, or land a well-paying job. Early childhood care and education, therefore, is the best public return.

What is HB 352?

HB 352 is an early literacy intervention bill passed by the Montana State Legislature during the 2023 session. It aims to increase the number of children who are reading proficiently at or above grade level by the end of third grade. School districts determine eligibility based on a screening process.

The early literacy intervention is designed to best meet the needs of local communities by taking a three-fold approach:

- ▶ Home-based programs: a program operated by a nonprofit entity for children who have not yet completed second grade. The program is required to foster parental engagement;
- ▶ Jumpstart programs: a program that is at least 4 weeks in duration and must take place during the time between the end of one school calendar year and the start of the next calendar year preceding a child's entry into kindergarten, 1st grade, 2nd grade, or 3rd grade;
- ▶ Classroom-based models: a half-time or full-time program for children who have not yet entered kindergarten.



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LEARN MORE

Many organizations and communities are working towards advancing early literacy and learning in Montana.

To learn more about these efforts and be a part of this movement, visit Zero to Five Montana's Early Literacy webpage:

<https://zerotofive.org/early-literacy/>

Citations

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