

## 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

- Parents and caregivers play the most immediate role in shaping a child's early foundation. When parents go to work, they want and need access to affordable quality child care that supports their child's healthy development and ensures a safe, nurturing start to their life.
- 80% of babies in Montana have parents working for a wage. These hard working parents also need access to quality child care for their young ones in order to continue providing for their families.
- Supported families and quality child care builds the foundation of a baby's growing brain, which is development necessary for them to thrive as adults.
- Quality child care can enhance school readiness and future educational achievement, lead to greater employment and earnings as an adult, and improve health throughout life.
- Infant and toddler slots are hard to find. Montana's total child care capacity doesn't even meet half of the demand, and infant slots are even more difficult to find. There is a gap of over 21,000 slots needed to care for all young children in the state.
- 59% of Montana's counties don't have enough child care slots to serve families who need care.
- Access to quality child care benefits the state's workforce.
- The average cost of child care for an infant in Montana is upwards of \$18,000 per year. In most of the state, infant care is as much as rent for an apartment.
- Families who are enrolled tribal members or who reside on tribal land are more likely than non-tribal families to report a lack of infant care.
- High-quality early education programs are proven to:
  - Help children enter kindergarten with the skills needed to succeed in school
  - Increase high-school graduation rates and college attendance
  - Reduce teen pregnancy rates, crime, and other social problems
  - Reduce long-term social costs for special education, child welfare, and public assistance.

### References:

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