



## 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

- Zero to Five Montana commissioned a survey, representative of Montana voters (October 2022, Montana State University).
  - 74% favor a public preschool option.
  - 77% believe the Montana state government should play a role in providing a public preschool option.
- In the absence of a public preschool program, students enter kindergarten with varying levels of social and academic development, creating an educational achievement gap.
- Public preschool has been shown to reduce behavior issues in the elementary and middle school years and increase the likelihood that students graduate high school and attend college.
- 61% of Montana's 3 & 4-year olds are not enrolled in any school readiness program (early childhood education/preschool, child care, etc.)
- Montana is one of only four states without a public preschool option.
- For every \$1 spent on early education there is up to a \$16 return on investment.
- Interventions, such as online programs, do not address the labor shortage (parents), or support the developmental needs of children in the ways in-person preschool programs can.
- Montana families spend an average of \$18,940 per year on early education expenses.
- We know kids are entering kindergarten not ready to learn. Focusing our attention on young children will help us get closer to ensuring children are meeting 3rd-grade reading standards.
- Over a 10-year span, Montana can expect a total economic burden of \$907 million because of a lack of access to child care and early childhood education.

### References:

First Things First. (2024, April 8). *Investing in early childhood - first things first*. <https://www.firstthingsfirst.org/early-childhood-matters/investing-in-early-childhood/>.

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Poll Commissioned by Zero to Five Montana through the Montana State University Human Ecology Learning and Problem Solving Lab among 501 registered voters in Montana. (2022).

Watson, A. (2024). *CHILDCARE IN MONTANA*. Montana Department of Labor and Industry. [https://lmi.mt.gov/\\_docs/Publications/EAG-Articles/EAG-0324\\_Final.pdf](https://lmi.mt.gov/_docs/Publications/EAG-Articles/EAG-0324_Final.pdf).