



## 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

- 44% of children under age 6 can be served by licensed child care in Montana. This means there is a 66% gap in meeting the supply for child care. 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 2022-23 academic year, only 34 percent of Montana fourth-graders were reading at or above grade level.
- 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.
- 40% 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.

### References:

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