



ZEROTOFIVE  
MONTANA

A photograph of a family in a backyard. A man on the left wears a yellow and blue baseball cap and is holding a black and white dog. A woman with long blonde hair, wearing a black top and a yellow polka-dot skirt, is sitting on the grass and laughing. A young child with curly hair is partially visible on the right. The background shows a wooden fence and some flowers.

## 2024 EARLY CHILDHOOD POLICY ROADSHOW: THE STATE OF MONTANA'S EARLY CHILDHOOD LANDSCAPE

**A SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS**

NOVEMBER 1, 2024





# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>02</b>	Executive Summary
<b>04</b>	Introduction
<b>06</b>	Findings - Supporting Young Children and Families
<b>07</b>	Findings - Concerns for Young Children and Families
<b>11</b>	Findings - Hopes for the Future
<b>14</b>	Findings - Most Pressing Early Childhood Issues
<b>17</b>	Conclusion
<b>18</b>	Evaluation Feedback

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



At Zero to Five Montana, we believe that solutions are rooted in the voices of our communities. As an advocacy organization dedicated to advancing Montana’s early childhood system, we know that listening to families, early childhood professionals, and local leaders is the foundation for effective policies that truly meet the needs of Montana’s youngest residents.

Guided by this commitment, our team hit the road this past summer, hosting our first “Community Conversations Roadshow” across nine Montana communities. Over four months, we traveled to Billings, Cut Bank, Great Falls, Helena, Livingston, Lodge Grass, Miles City, Pablo, and Red Lodge.

With Post-it Notes in hand and eager to hear directly from communities, we engaged in candid discussions about early childhood needs, challenges, and aspirations. We also conducted advocacy training and gathered valuable input to guide our legislative policy priorities.

The insights shared by community members revealed both the successes and pressing challenges in Montana’s early childhood system. Key themes emerged around:

- **The need for high-quality early learning opportunities, which remain limited in both availability and accessibility.**
- **The barriers families face in accessing the Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship, an essential support for many.**
- **The ongoing struggle to recruit and retain early care and education (ECE) professionals statewide.**
- **The affordability and availability of healthcare, impacting families’ ability to thrive.**
- **The difficulty in meeting basic needs, including food, housing, and child care.**

These conversations not only underscored the importance of early childhood, but also illuminated the deep commitment within Montana’s communities to see children and families flourish.

We used the findings from the Roadshow to shape our 2025 Policy Agenda, identifying key areas for legislative action. Based on the perspectives shared with us, we recommend that the Montana State Legislature consider policies including:

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- Establishing an early care and education trust fund to create an avenue for Montana to strengthen and invest in the state’s early childhood infrastructure.
  - Enact a comprehensive tax credit package that includes a child tax credit for working families with young children, credits for child care workers, and for employers offering child care benefits.
  - Increasing the Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship income threshold to the maximum allowable level (85% of the state median income) to ensure more working parents can afford and access child care services.
  - Expand opportunities to recruit, retain, and support the early care and education workforce to ensure children have access to high-quality experiences (for example: apprenticeship programs, early childhood career and technical education, tuition assistance, or wage supplements).

We recognize our work does not end here. This Roadshow marks just one step in our ongoing commitment to listening to and amplifying the voices of Montana’s communities. We will continue to use feedback from this and future conversations to shape our policy efforts and drive meaningful change.

The strength of our early childhood system – and ultimately the future of Montana – depends on a collaborative, systems-level approach that harness the expertise and resources from diverse sectors. While Zero to Five Montana may not be able to address every issue raised, we are sharing these findings to foster partnerships and inform future advocacy and action.

On behalf of Zero to Five Montana, I want to thank each of the communities and participants who joined us for these critical conversations. Your insights, experiences, and aspirations are central to our work, and we remain committed to being a trusted resource and advocate, advancing access to early care and education, supporting families, and elevating the voices of those who matter most – Montana’s children and families.



Caitlin Jensen  
Executive Director, Zero to Five Montana



# INTRODUCTION

Over the course of four months, the Zero to Five Montana team traveled across the state to engage with communities and gather input on early childhood policy priorities for Montana. The team visited nine communities including Billings, Cut Bank, Great Falls, Helena, Livingston, Lodge Grass, Miles City, Pablo, and Red Lodge. In each location, local community leaders partnered with Zero to Five Montana by offering a venue, inviting participants, and welcoming us into their communities. The goal was to provide a welcoming space for community members to share their insights and experiences with the early childhood system in their area. Each community conversation was unique and attendees varied widely, including early childhood professionals, parents, advocates, employers, nonprofit representatives, family advocates, and more.

Zero to Five Montana facilitated discussions focusing on what community members felt was going well and what could be improved upon for early childhood in Montana. For each conversation, participants answered the following four questions:

- 1 From your perspective, what is your community and/or Montana doing well in supporting young children and families?
- 2 As a state (compared to other states) we invest very little in programs and services for young children. In thinking about your children and/or young children in your community, what are you most concerned about?
- 3 In 10-20 years from now, what do you hope will look different (or the same) for children in Montana?
- 4 What are the most pressing early childhood issues for you for the upcoming election/legislative session?

For one to two hours, communities discussed these questions. Groups were split into two depending on the number of attendees. Zero to Five Montana facilitated these conversations and documented responses anonymously. Additionally, Zero to Five Montana offered mini-grants to each local partner to assist with convening expenses including but not limited to, food, stipends for parent participants, and supplies.

Once all nine community conversations were complete, Zero to Five Montana consolidated the insights, perspectives, and expertise to guide our 2025 policy agenda. The information gathered will continue to help inform our policy and advocacy work in the future.

Zero to Five Montana will continue to ensure our work is aligned with the needs of families, early childhood professionals, and communities across the state. Out of the nine communities visited, we provided advocacy training to four groups. This was offered as a voluntary addition to the community conversations. The advocacy training included basic information about engaging with the Montana State Legislature, advocacy, and messaging along with information about available resources.

This report provides an overview of Zero to Five Montana’s findings from our “Community Conversation Roadshow” and how we, as an organization, intend to use this information in our work moving forward.

## Community Conversation Roadshow Snapshot

### WHO:

136 community conversation participants

34 Early Childhood Advocacy 101 training participants

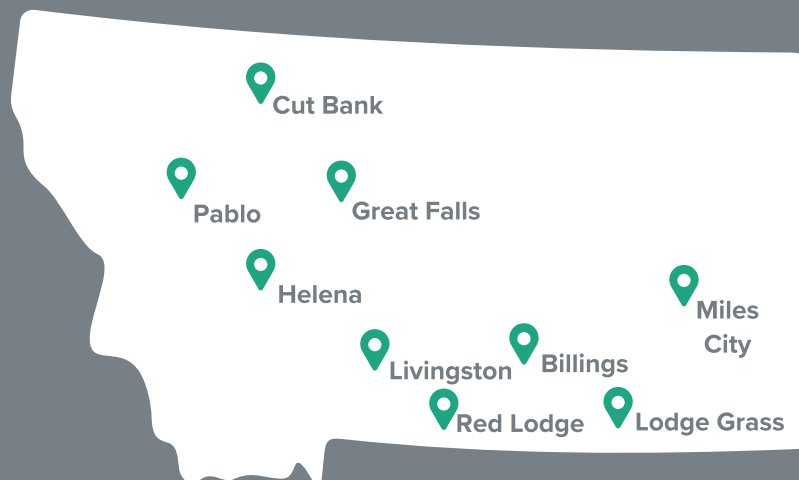
### WHEN:

June 2024 through September 2024

### WHY:

- Gather insight and feedback on early childhood issues in Montana from those who are most affected by policy decisions.
- Engage with community members in various locations across Montana to ensure diverse representation of the state.
- Analyze data to inform Zero to Five Montana’s policy priorities and recommendations before the 2025 Montana Legislative Session.
- Develop and communicate a report summarizing findings to share with partners.
- Provide resources and support to individuals in local communities to equip them with the tools and knowledge to confidently participate in the election and upcoming session.
- Build relationships with individuals throughout the state and foster local connections through lived experience.

### WHERE:



# FINDINGS

Below is a summary of responses gathered from all nine community conversations. While we aimed to capture all key points raised, a few findings mentioned only once were omitted for the sake of clarity and focus. Nevertheless, we strived to ensure the summary accurately reflects the broader themes, concerns, and ideas shared during these conversations.

## How Montana is Supporting Young Children and Families

### Community Connection and Collaboration:

Communities feel there is increasing collaboration, sharing, and investment in early childhood. This includes mentions of various organizations such as local libraries, Head Start programs, and other non-profits as well as community events and activities. Along these lines, communities indicated family outreach is improving, specifically citing an increase in early intervention screenings, information about perinatal mental health, and general early childhood resources (including cultural preservation resources). There is also a strong culture of care for each other among community members and sense of support for early childhood.

### Local and Statewide Initiatives:

Communities noted there is an increasing number of local and state task forces and coalitions focused on early childhood. Various state coalitions and organizations were mentioned as helpful resources.

### Raised Awareness of Early Childhood:

Communities believe there is a raised sense of awareness and recognition of the importance of early childhood. More people are coming to the table and getting involved than ever before, including local businesses.

*“Early childhood is not just a family issue - it’s an everybody issue.”  
- Helena Participant*

### Montana:

Communities feel Montana is an overall safe place to raise a child. Community members recognize that the existing licensed child care programs and providers (including Head Start) offer safe learning opportunities.

### Early Learning Opportunities:

Communities see an increasing number of child care options in Montana and expressed excitement about the newly established early literacy programming being offered by public school districts.



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## Concerns Impacting Young Children and Families

### Accessibility and Affordability:

Although communities notice an increase in services and supports, they still indicated that there is a lack of resources and choices available for families, particularly families with children ages 0-5. This concern includes child care (especially for infant and toddler care), after-school and summer programs, and overall resources and services. In many cases, families face long waitlists to access care and services. Inaccessible child care is particularly present among rural, immigrant/seasonal, and tribal communities. Communities noted that inaccessibility is also an equity issue where many families either do not know or cannot access existing supports and resources. Lack of access also included concerns with the overall affordability of child care, especially for lower- and middle-class families.

### The Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship (BBCCS):

Communities are concerned with the eligibility criteria for the BBCCS including the low eligibility income threshold and other requirements necessary to qualify such as child support enforcement compliance. Communities mentioned the current system is not equitable and eligibility levels do not consider the cost of living. Overall, communities feel the scholarship does not reach enough families.



*Community Conversation in Red Lodge, MT*

### The Availability of High-Quality Child Care:

Communities are worried about the availability of high-quality and safe child care, expressing the importance of licensed and culturally appropriate programs. Specific safety concerns, particularly with unlicensed care, include high child-to-staff ratios (especially with infants), lack of background checks and vaccination requirements, below-standard facility environments, and the cut-off age requirements for children. Communities believe increasing child care slots is being prioritized over providing quality child care. Communities also feel there is a lack of incentive to become a licensed program.

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### **Child Care Operations:**

Communities are concerned with the expense required to efficiently open and operate a child care business. Communities are also concerned with the number of barriers that exist to opening and operating a child care business including finding and keeping insurance, understanding the paperwork process, and meeting licensing requirements (such as the need for insurance in order to be licensed and vice versa). Child care providers feel overwhelmed with the number of resources and steps it takes to open a child care. Lastly, communities are concerned with a child care provider’s ability to provide living wages and benefits for staff within their programs. Communities understand providers walk a fine line between not raising rates for parents and paying themselves and their staff livable wages.

### **Child Welfare:**

Communities feel Montana’s Child Protective Services system needs improvement and are worried about the increasing demand for and limited supply of foster parents.

### **Child Care Workforce:**

Communities are concerned with the recruitment and retention of the child care workforce. Participants also expressed concerns with how the industry’s historically low wages, minimal benefits, and demanding work environment lead to mental health issues, high turnover, and burnout. Communities also expressed concern about the professionalism of the industry including the stigma of child care as “babysitting” and that some child care workers lack the qualifications for the job, including education and training.

### **State Capacity:**

Communities worry about Montana’s lack of capacity to meet the needs of every child. This includes the general system, communities, parents, and government entities charged to provide early care and education services among families, children, and workers in the field of early education and health and human services.



*Community Conversation in Livingston, MT*



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### Basic Human Needs Security:

Communities are concerned with housing, food, economic, health (including mental health), and job security. Additionally, they feel Montana is expensive and often requires two incomes to cover living expenses, leaving many parents unable to stay at home with their children if they wish to do so. On the flip side, communities see parents struggling to work because they cannot afford child care. Communities are also concerned about the ripple effect of historical and generational trauma.

### Legislators and Early Childhood:

Communities expressed a desire for deeper engagement and connection between legislators and the needs of young children and families. They feel limited funding for early childhood programs may reflect a gap in understanding of families' and providers' daily challenges. Some believe legislators' social priorities do not always align with constituent values and seek more open dialogue. Additionally, communities worry about the time advocates spend defending early childhood rather than for proactive solutions.



*Community Conversation in Miles City, MT*

### Family-Friendly Policies:

Communities mentioned many employers do not provide family-friendly policies including flexible work arrangements, paid family and medical leave, and child care supports.

*“It is easy to say you’re pro-family but not as easy to enact pro-family legislation.” - Livingston Participant*

### Health:

Communities feel there is a lack of health resources including prenatal and newborn care and mental health services. They are also concerned with the lack of education and support around sexually transmitted diseases, domestic violence, homelessness, teen pregnancies, and substance use disorder. Communities see a prevalent lack of trauma-informed support and resources for tribal communities and lower-income families. Communities are also concerned with the state’s potential Medicaid expansion sunset. Further, communities see barriers with health insurance coverage; many providers will not accept certain health insurance, and certain health care services are not covered by the insurance. For example, some public school district’s health insurance has restrictions on covering early examinations such as eye exams.



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### Screenings and Services for Children with Disabilities:

Communities are concerned with the availability of comprehensive screenings and services for children with disabilities. Communities also noted evaluations take too long. Child care providers reported they do not have the capacity and/or their business insurance does not allow them to serve children with high needs. This leaves many children without care.

### Early Literacy Intervention Programs:

While communities are happy House Bill 352 passed during the 2023 Legislative Session and early literacy intervention programs are being administered, some are concerned about its implementation. Specifically, communities are worried that school districts participating in early literacy intervention programs are taking 4-year-old slots from child care providers. Communities are also worried the early literacy programming is not developmentally appropriate for 4-year-olds.

### School Readiness and School Capacity:

Communities worry about the impacts of COVID-19 and children's readiness for school including literacy and social-emotional development. Communities are also concerned with the programming gap between child care and formal schooling (K-12) as well as the impacts of the 4-day school week. Communities feel school districts do not have the capacity to provide effective support and are concerned with the lack of collaboration between school districts and early childhood sectors. Further, communities are concerned with the lack of collaboration between schools located near each other, especially when it comes to calendar and curriculum consistency.

### Availability of High-Quality Teachers:

Communities feel there are not enough high-quality early childhood professionals. Additionally, K-12 teachers cite a lack of education requirements and experience needed to become a teacher.

### Data Collection:

Communities are concerned with the lack of data on child care and families across Montana.

### Information:

Communities are worried about how parents find and access information about early childhood resources, supports, and services. Additionally, they are concerned with the stigma that exists, especially for fathers, around asking for help and engaging with available services.



*Community Conversation in Great Falls, MT*

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## Montana's Hope for the Future

### Accessible, Affordable, and High-Quality Child Care:

Communities hope accessible, affordable, and available high-quality child care is offered in various ways including private child care, public preschool, after-school programs, and summer programs. Participants hope to see all child care facilities have:

- Safe and healthy environments
- Licensed status
- Culturally appropriate curriculum
- Longer child care hours
- Outside learning opportunities
- Trauma-informed practices

Communities hope to see an end to child care waitlists and for parents to have options to choose the care they want for their children. They also hope to have higher financial reimbursements for participants in STARS to Quality, the state's child care quality rating improvement program.

### Investment in Early Education:

Communities want more funding and investment in early childhood education. They hope Montana will have higher literacy rates and early childhood education will focus on development rather than academics.

### Resources and Capacity:

Communities wish that existing programs continue and Montana is equipped with enough resources and capacity so every child's needs are met, especially children with high needs.



*Community Conversation on the Crow Reservation in Lodge Grass, MT*

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### **Community Connection and Awareness:**

Communities are looking forward to widespread recognition of the importance of early childhood development, along with investments that align with and support that understanding. This includes more businesses investing in family-friendly initiatives as well as robust social support networks. They also hope all parents feel empowered and treated as the primary educators of their children and know where to go for resources such as licensed child care and parenting classes (e.g., Circle of Security). They hope every person feels safe and has spaces to go to establish stronger connections with their community. Participants also wish that families, communities, and cultures continue to be valued. Lastly, communities hope for more connection and feedback through resource hubs that uplift best early childhood practices across the state.

### **Child Care Workforce:**

Communities hope the child care workforce has high wages and available benefits. They want members of the child care workforce to be treated as professionals with supports, resources, and compensation. They also hope the child care workforce is part of the policy decision-making process.

### **Wraparound and Streamlined Services:**

Communities want more support and funding to develop a comprehensive system for essential services including child care, home visiting, and early intervention services. They want a system that prioritizes the holistic development of a child.

### **Child Care Operations:**

Communities wish for child care to be recognized as a business and hope to see more supports put towards the industry. Communities cited general funding, accessibility and affordability of business liability insurance, and licensing assistance as specific examples. Communities also hope child care providers can have a better work-life balance.



*Community Conversation on the Flathead Reservation in Pablo, MT*



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### **Security and Affordability:**

Communities want Montana to be an affordable place to live where one's basic needs are met including housing, child care, and food access. Communities hope to see more programs, resources, and overall economic development (including business and housing growth). Communities also hope it is financially viable for one parent to stay home. If both parents choose to work, communities want them to have choices and access to high-quality child care. Further, communities hope grandparents are offered financial support for taking care of their grandchildren. Lastly, communities wish that personal well-being and work-life balance are prioritized.

### **Health:**

Communities desire accessible and comprehensive quality health supports, especially for mental health, and want all children to be automatically provided health care coverage. Communities also hope for 6-12 months of statewide paid family and medical leave. Lastly, communities hope to see more treatment centers and a greater focus on trauma and culturally informed care.

*"[I hope] we're proactive and not always reactive." - Billings Participant*

### **Tribal:**

Communities hope for more connection between state government and tribal communities ensuring policies take into account tribal-specific issues and tribal sovereignty. Communities hope different sectors find common ground and work together for tribal people in Montana.

### **Early Childhood and School Collaboration:**

Communities want to see more collaboration between school districts and the early childhood sector. Specifically, school districts should integrate early learning standards and emphasize art, music, and recess. In general, communities hope the future education system prepares children for life rather than standardized tests.

### **Child's Rights and Education:**

Communities dream that every child is deeply seen, known, prioritized, and valued. They hope there is less screen-time use and every child excels and becomes a leader in their community. They want children to have enough support to recover from the learning challenges following pandemic closures.. Lastly, communities hope children are educated on climate change, environmental sustainability, and preservation.

### **Preservation:**

Communities hope Montana continues to be a natural, safe, and beautiful place to live.

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# The Most Pressing Early Childhood Issues for the Upcoming Legislative Session

## Increased Funding for Early Childhood:

Communities want to see increased sustainable funding for early childhood. This includes tax credits or grants for child care facility startup and operations, child care availability and affordability, early childhood development and services, and employer incentives. Communities also want a better reimbursement system for child care programs providing food. Grandparents who provide care should also be considered for supports and funding. Communities suggested the aforementioned funds could be distributed through a child care trust fund using the tax revenue generated from cannabis sales.

## Legislators and Early Childhood:

Communities want legislators to be more connected to Montana’s early childhood issues. Ideally, communities would like legislators to visit child care programs in both urban and rural areas to gain a first-hand understanding. Additionally, communities seek more transparency about legislative actions in and out of session and hope legislators will give greater consideration to parents’ voices. Lastly, communities believe that reducing political division and holding legislative sessions annually, rather than biannually, would strengthen support for early childhood issues.

*“There is too much at stake.” - Great Falls Participant*

## Investment in Early Education:

Communities hope there is more funding and investment in early childhood education. They hope Montana has higher literacy rates and early childhood education focuses on development rather than academics.

## Affordable, Accessible, and Licensed Child Care:

Communities recognize families need affordable and accessible child care. However, communities do not want child care availability to be prioritized over high-quality, licensed, and safe programs. Communities cited the recent change in ratio standards for unlicensed child care as an example, and want it overturned. Communities want to see increased regulations around child care pricing, child care liability insurance, background checks, immunizations, and ratios. Additionally, they want more pathways to get licensed and a more accessible list of licensed child care providers.



*Community Conversation in Cut Bank, MT*

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### **Recruit and Retain the Child Care Workforce:**

Communities want higher wages and better benefits for the child care workforce. This includes:

- Tax credits
- Wage supplements
- STARS to Quality funding (currently a program receives a higher financial incentive the higher the STAR level)
- Grow Your Own initiatives (work-based learning, community school collaboration)
- Collective health insurance
- Retirement benefits
- Respite pool
- Higher education payments

They also want child care providers to have access to more training (especially on development and attachment) and professional development opportunities including a culturally responsive apprenticeship program with a track for Indigenous providers.

### **The Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship (BBCCS):**

Communities want the BBCCS eligibility income level expanded, categorical eligibility for early childhood professionals included, presumptive eligibility expanded, and child support compliance requirements removed. Other ideas included basing eligibility levels on net income instead of gross income, moving the BBCCS with the child, and ensuring equitable eligibility for single parents and/or dual income eligibility.

### **Family Support:**

Communities hope for improvements to the state's Child Protective Services and foster care systems. Within the welfare system, communities hope to see more foster parents. Communities also want increased support for home visiting programs.



*Community Conversation in Billings, MT*



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### Early Learning Programs:

Communities want the early literacy intervention program funding to be maintained and expanded. Communities also want House Bill 352 to include support for mixed delivery (e.g., a private child care provider could offer the early literacy programming in their program and receive funding), have school districts use early learning standards, and implement earlier screenings. Additionally, communities want more support systems (especially for rural and lower-income families) around early learning including public preschool, accessible after-school and summer programs, and more funding for children with disabilities and high needs.

### Health Care:

Communities want accessible and affordable health care, especially for children, pregnant women, and parents. Mental and behavioral health services, trauma support, suicide prevention, substance use disorder treatment centers, parenting classes, and paid family leave should also be prioritized. Communities want to see Medicaid expanded and the application process streamlined and accessible. Communities cited the current application does not take into account transportation barriers, internet access, or literacy ability as well as burdensome wait times and paperwork.

### Wraparound and Streamlined Services and Information:

Communities want a streamlined and trauma-informed application system for public service programs such as the Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and Healthy Montana Kids. Additionally, communities want accessible information on benefits, resources, and program offerings for providers, parents, educators, and the public. This includes the infrastructure and capacity of systems within the Department of Public Health and Human Services and the Office of Public Instruction.

### Security and Affordability:

Communities want Montana to be an affordable place to live including expenses like housing (especially for teachers), child care, and food. Food programs like the Child and Adult Care Food Program should expand their eligibility levels and reduce access barriers. Wages should keep up with inflation and the overall cost of living.



*Community Conversation in Helena, MT*

# CONCLUSION

The Zero to Five Montana team embarked on a mission to engage with communities across the state, aiming to uncover a unified message around the most pressing early childhood issues that affect our children and families every day. Our goal was to ensure the public policy solutions we advocate for in the 2025 legislative session truly reflect the needs and aspirations of parents, early childhood professionals, and communities throughout Montana. By elevating the voices of those within our communities, we sought to ensure they are heard and valued in the decision-making process and empowered to hope for our children and our future.

The community conversations highlighted several pressing challenges: limited availability and accessibility of high-quality early learning opportunities, significant barriers for families in accessing the Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship, ongoing difficulties in recruiting and retaining early childhood professionals, and concerns around the affordability and availability of healthcare. Additionally, families continue to face struggles in meeting basic needs such as food, housing, and child care.

The information gathered from this Roadshow was used to inform Zero to Five Montana's 2025 Policy Agenda and will continue to be used to inform future policy work. We also hope this report will serve as a useful tool for the various partners and leaders across the state of Montana.

## Recommendations

The Roadshow findings indicate the Montana State Legislature could take measures to improve the early childhood system by enacting policies such as:

- 1 Establishing an early care and education trust fund to create an avenue for Montana to strengthen and invest in the state's early childhood infrastructure.
- 2 Enact a comprehensive tax credit package that includes a child tax credit for working families with young children, credits for child care workers, and for employers offering child care benefits.
- 3 Increasing the Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship income threshold to the maximum allowable level (85% of the state median income) to ensure more working parents can afford and access child care services.
- 4 Expand opportunities to recruit, retain, and support the early care and education workforce to ensure children have access to high-quality experiences (for example: apprenticeship programs, early childhood career and technical education, tuition assistance, or wage supplements).

We urge our lawmakers, partners, and community members to learn from these insights and take action to ensure Montana remains an ideal place to live and raise a family. Our team is dedicated to continuing this community-led approach and looks forward to future conversations through our upcoming roadshows.

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## Evaluation Feedback

- 100% felt like their experience, expertise, and insights were valued (i.e., will help to inform state-level policy strategy work, Zero to Five Montana policy priorities, etc.).
- 100% have a better understanding of their community's early childhood issues
- 100% have a better understanding of Zero to Five Montana and the organization's work
- 100% were very satisfied with the advocacy training
- 100% have a better understanding of how to advocate for policy solutions
- 100% would attend other events in the future
- 100% would be interested in being trained to offer similar advocacy training for their community
- 95% felt Zero to Five Montana created a welcoming space for participants

### What did you like most about the Community Conversation?

- "Coming together for a common goal."
- "I liked that everyone seemed involved and invested in the issues surrounding Early Childhood."
- "I appreciated the wide range of roles in the community that were represented and the respect given by everyone to each group member's respective expertise."
- "Hearing from colleagues, commiserating, and sharing ideas."
- "It felt like we were listened to, and it felt like a productive use of our time and input. Like what we said would be taken and something might get done."
- "The variety of conversations we got to have."

### What was your biggest takeaway from the Community Conversation?

- "That many different types of people in the community are concerned for the future of young children and their families and are willing to put in the work for positive change."
- "That Zero to Five will advocate the best they can for our needs in our communities here in Montana."
- "We need leaders that will champion for us."
- "The amount of collaboration is heartening. I really feel that if communities are able to keep up cooperation, we can achieve a lot."
- "We are all working towards the same goals."
- "I enjoyed finding out more about advocacy resources and supports and ways we can get involved!"

### What would support your ongoing ability to advocate for policy solutions?

- Bill-tracking during legislation
- Policy briefs
- Informational webinars
- Additional community conversations
- Facilitated introductions to elected officials



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## Appreciation and Acknowledgment

Zero to Five Montana's Community Conversation Roadshow would not have been possible without the support of our valued partners, community members, and participants. We are deeply grateful to everyone who attended and contributed to this initiative. Their insights into Montana's early childhood system were invaluable, shaping our work and guiding the future of early childhood in the state. Below is a list of community partners who played a crucial role in the Roadshow's success.

*Best Beginnings of Yellowstone County*  
*United Way of Yellowstone County*  
*Opportunities Inc. (Great Falls)*  
*Emerson/Annex Head Start & Early Head Start (Great Falls)*  
*Cut Bank Head Start*  
*Early Childhood Coalition of the Greater Helena Area*  
*Child Care Connections*  
*Rocky Mountain Development Council (Helena)*  
*Park County Early Childhood Coalition*

*Community Health Partners (Livingston)*  
*Mountain Shadow Association (Lodge Grass)*  
*Big Horn County Best Beginnings Coalition*  
*Sutherland Consulting (Hardin)*  
*Raise Montana*  
*Stockman Bank (Miles City)*  
*Young Child Wellness Council (Pablo)*  
*Helping Hands Fund (Pablo)*  
*Red Lodge Area Community Foundation*  
*Carbon County Early Childhood Coalition*



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*On behalf Zero to Five Montana's policy team, Alex DuBois (Policy & Engagement Director), Callie Parr (Tribal Coordinator), Sarah Froehlke (Policy Analyst), Karen Gilbert (Communications Director) and Caitlin Jensen (Executive Director), we thank you for your commitment to children and families across our beautiful state.*