

## Merit Pay

### What is Merit Pay?

Merit Pay is a Best Beginnings program that promotes professional development among those who care for and educate young children in registered or licensed child care programs. Funded through the federal Child Care and Development Fund, the Merit Pay award provides an incentive for early childhood practitioners to pursue education and training to help them improve the quality of services they provide to young children and families. Merit Pay is administered by the Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) Early Childhood Services Bureau.

### How does it work?

Early care and education practitioners can choose to apply for three different types of Merit Pay:

#### **Merit Pay I**

- Individual must complete a 23 hour track (\$300), or a 50 hour track (\$500) of non-college credit training, which cannot include the 60 hour infant/toddler training
- Applicants must submit a plan for completing training
- Training must be approved through the Montana Training Approval System administered by The Early Childhood Project

#### **Higher Education Merit Pay**

- Acceptance into a college program which leads to a degree in Early Childhood or Child Development, OR
- Current participation in college coursework that leads to the completion of a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential or a Child Care Development Specialist (CCDS) Apprenticeship Certificate, OR
- Participation in a higher education program that emphasizes Early Childhood and will lead to a Level IV or higher on the Montana Early Care and Education Practitioner Registry.
- An award of \$750 is available for each of two semesters per year (minimum of six Early Childhood credits must be taken) for a maximum award of \$1,500.

Note: Applicants must be on the Montana Early Care and Education Practitioner Registry (at any level) to receive the award when courses are completed.

## **Infant Toddler Merit Pay**

- Individuals must successfully complete the 60 hour Montana Infant Toddler Training (a.k.a. West ED Training) facilitated by a certified Infant Toddler trainer
- Payment will be awarded upon successful completion of training, verified with a copy of the Certified Infant Toddler Certificate issued by DPHHS/Early Childhood Services Bureau.

## **What Training is Acceptable?**

Training must be approved through the Montana Early Care and Education Training Approval System to be credited towards Merit Pay. The following types of training do not qualify:

- Courses required in order to participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). Training that goes above and beyond the CACFP requirements, and that is approved through the Training Approval System, may qualify.
- CPR/First Aid training does not count towards the annual training requirements for licensing and will not be counted towards Merit Pay
- For Higher Ed Merit Pay – All undergraduate and graduate course work must be completed at a college or university located in Montana, that is regionally accredited by the US Department of Education.

## **Who Can Apply?**

Individuals working at least 15 hours a week in a licensed or registered child care facility in Montana are eligible to apply for any of the three types of Merit Pay. Those working at least 15 hours a week in a Head Start, tribal Head Start, Early Head Start or a Child Care Resource & Referral agency are eligible to apply for Higher Education Merit Pay. Applicants for Higher Ed Merit Pay will be ineligible if receiving full funding from Pell Grants, Head Start or other sources.

## **How is Priority Determined for Merit Pay?**

Priority is given to individuals who have never received Merit Pay before. Higher Ed Merit Pay is granted according to income and other financial assistance available. If all factors are even, registered CCDS Apprentices will receive priority.

## **Where Do I Get a Merit Pay Application?**

Merit Pay applications become available in August of each year. You can pick one up at your nearest Child Care Resource and Referral Agency, or contact DPHHS – Early Childhood Services Bureau at 1-866-239-0458.



## **Early Childhood Project**

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