



M O N T A N A E A R L Y  
C H I L D H O O D

# CAREER WORKBOOK



montana  
early childhood project



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# Welcome!

This early childhood education career workbook is designed just for you. Use these pages to take notes, reflect on your learning, and dream big about your professional future in early care and education.



Whether you're just beginning your journey or continuing to grow, this space is yours to explore possibilities, set goals, and celebrate progress. Your voice, your passion, your path - it all starts here.

# About this workbook

Every child's development is shaped by their relationships, experiences, and environment. When children have strong relationships and access to high-quality learning, they build the foundation for their future. Child care and early learning programs give children the chance to play, learn, and grow with caring adults who help support their development.

Working in early childhood is one of the most important roles in any community. The Early Childhood Project, along with our partners mentioned throughout this document, created this workbook to help you explore career options, answer common questions, and connect you with resources for growth.

This workbook includes helpful tools and resources to guide your journey. Whether you are just starting out or looking to advance, we hope it helps you take the next step in your career - and remember, the Early Childhood Project and all the partners listed in this book are here to help you along the way. Choosing a career in early childhood means making a lasting difference in the lives of children, families, and your community. YOU make a difference.



# Do you want to work with children and young families?

## **Congratulations on taking the first step!**

Choosing to work with young children is choosing to make a lasting difference. The early years are a time of incredible growth, and your work can help shape children's futures, strengthen families, and support entire communities.

Early childhood careers are both challenging and deeply rewarding - and no matter where you begin, there are many opportunities to grow, learn, and lead in this field.

## **What is early childhood?**

Early childhood refers to the period in the life cycle from birth through age eight.

## **What is unique about the early childhood field?**

Early childhood professionals work closely with both young children and families to provide support, care, and education while nurturing and helping children grow, develop and learn during a critical time for brain development.

## **Who are the children with whom early childhood professionals work?**

Early childhood professionals work with children ages birth to age eight, including infants, toddlers, preschoolers and school-age children from diverse backgrounds and with a range of strengths, challenges and abilities.

## **Where do early childhood professionals work with children and families?**

Early childhood professionals work in a variety of settings including: child care centers and family and group homes; private preschools; Head Start and Early Head Start; kindergarten through third grade classrooms; various special education settings; before and afterschool programs; community-based agencies; family education and support programs; early intervention programs; colleges and state and local governments.



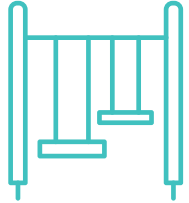
# Early Childhood Programs and Role Types

## PROGRAM TYPES



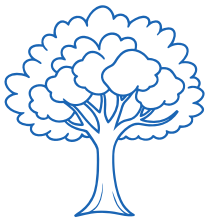
### CHILD CARE CENTER

Child Care Centers provide care in an out-of-home setting for 16 or more children on a regular basis



### GROUP CHILD CARE

Group Child Care facilities provide care in a private residence or other structure for nine to 15 children on a regular basis



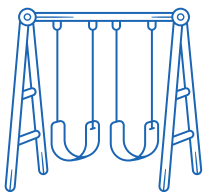
### FAMILY CHILD CARE

Family child care facilities provide care in a private residence or other structure for three to eight children on a regular basis



### FFN

FFN providers provide care in a private residence either for a sibling group of any size or for no more than six children from separate households



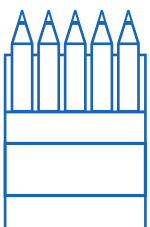
### RCE

RCE Providers provide care in a private residence either for a sibling group of any size or for no more than two children from separate households



### SCHOOL AGE CARE FACILITY

School Age Care Facilities provide care on a regular basis only to school-age children and during out-of-school time hours



### DROP IN CARE

Drop in child care facilities provide care for children in an out-of-home setting on an unscheduled or on-demand basis while parents attend discreet activities like meetings, appointments, or leisure activities

## POSITION TYPES



### DIRECTOR

Responsible for the health, safety, supervision, protection, and guidance of the children in care and the operation of the child care program at all times



### SITE DIRECTOR

Responsible for being on-site during the facility's operating hours and providing supervision & mentoring for program staff



### LEAD TEACHER

Responsible for facility activity planning and delivery



### TEACHER

Supports lead teacher and director with instructional support to children and implement developmentally appropriate programming



### SUBSTITUTE

Fills in for other roles as needed - This role must meet the qualification of the position that they are filling in for



### TRAINEE

Entry level role - This role is only valid for 90 days while trainings are being completed

## TRAINING & QUALIFICATIONS



### Required For ALL Roles:

- Background Checks
- Current on Practitioner Registry
- CPR & Pediatric First Aid
- CPR & First Aid - School Age Program staff only
- Orientation Trainings



### Annual Training Hours:

- 16 hours
- 8 hours: School Age Staff & FFN providers
- Substitutes do not need to meet a minimum training hour requirement

# The Path to Becoming an Early Childhood Professional

## **How Do You Start on the Career Path?**

There is no single starting point on the journey to becoming an early childhood professional. Each person enters the field in a way that reflects their background, goals, and life experiences. Every pathway is valued!

Some individuals begin working in early childhood settings right away and complete their first level of training while on the job. Others choose a more formal education route, starting with a one year certificate or an associates degree from a community or tribal college. Some future educators enroll directly into a bachelor's degree program, especially if they are working towards teacher licensure or advanced roles in the field.

For some, the journey starts even earlier. High schools may offer early childhood courses, dual-credit options, or work-based learning that allows students to begin earning credentials and experience before graduation. No matter where you begin, every step along the pathway builds knowledge, skills, and confidence. Your experience, education, and dedication all contribute to your growth as a professional and to the well being of the children and families you will serve.

## **Foundational educational requirements in early childhood:**

There are several licensing requirements that must be met to be approved to work with children in a direct care role in a licensed or registered facility. These include completing approved early childhood training, earning First Aid and CPR Certifications, including Pediatric First Aid as required, and passing a comprehensive criminal background check that includes an FBI based fingerprint check. Complete staffing and background check qualifications can be found under Montana ARM 37.96.9 and 37.96.10.

In licensed programs, there must always be at least one staff member on site who holds a valid First Aid and CPR Certificate. As an early childhood professional, you are also responsible for maintaining your skills and knowledge by completing ongoing professional development each year. For a full breakdown of training requirements by program type, please review the graphic on page 4.

## **Reasons a person may not be eligible for working in early childhood:**

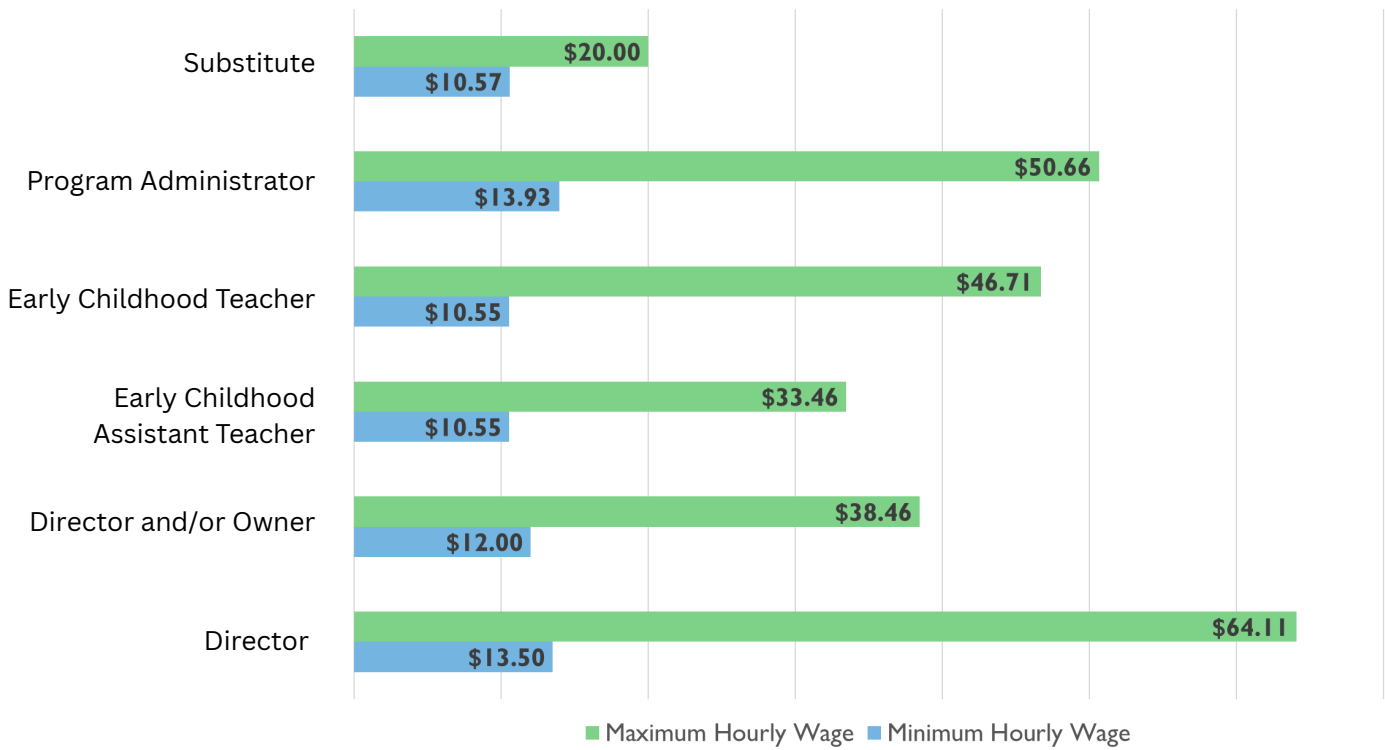
Anyone who has a substantiated report with Child Protective Services, is a registered sexual or violent offender, or has been convicted of certain criminal offenses may/will be ineligible to work in an early childhood field. Complete background check qualifications can be found under Montana ARM 37.96.10.

# Career Pathways

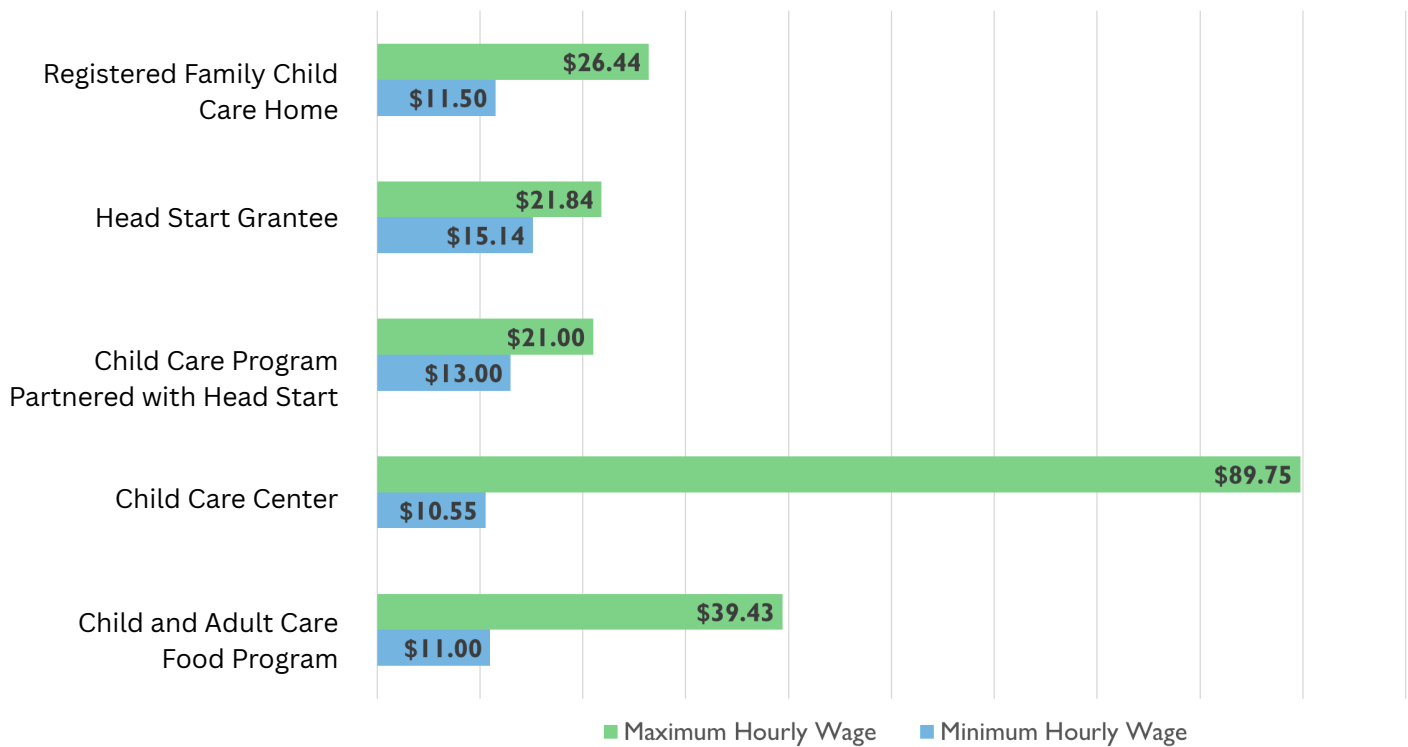


# Field Data in Early Childhood

## Wages by Position

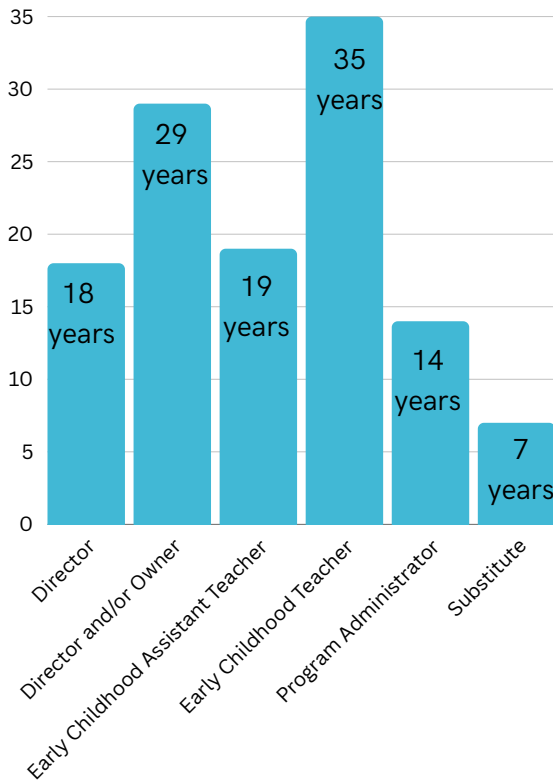


## Wages by Program Type

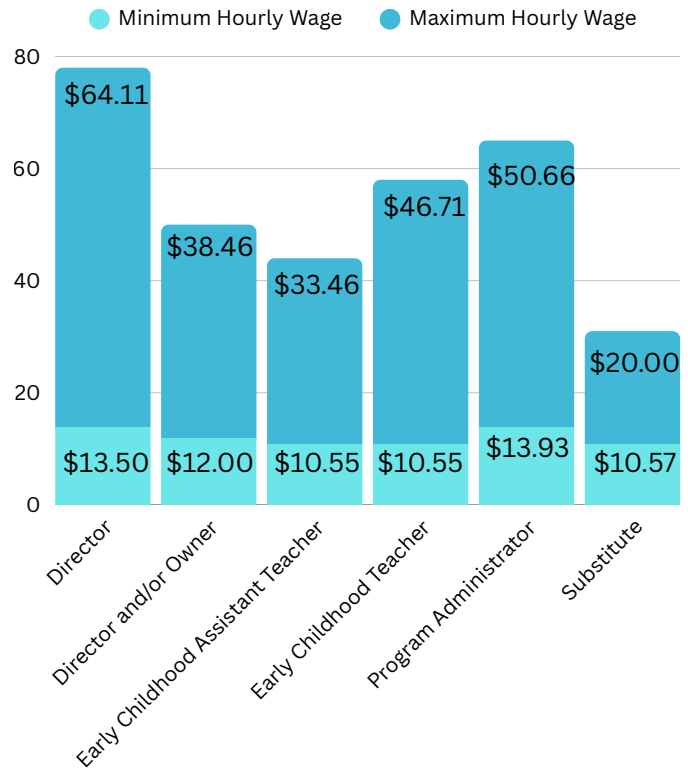


# Field Data in Early Childhood

## Maximum Years by Position



## Wages by Position



All data included in this report is aggregated and contains no personally identifiable information. Data was sourced from the Early Childhood Project Registry Workforce database.

# Degree and Credential Glossary

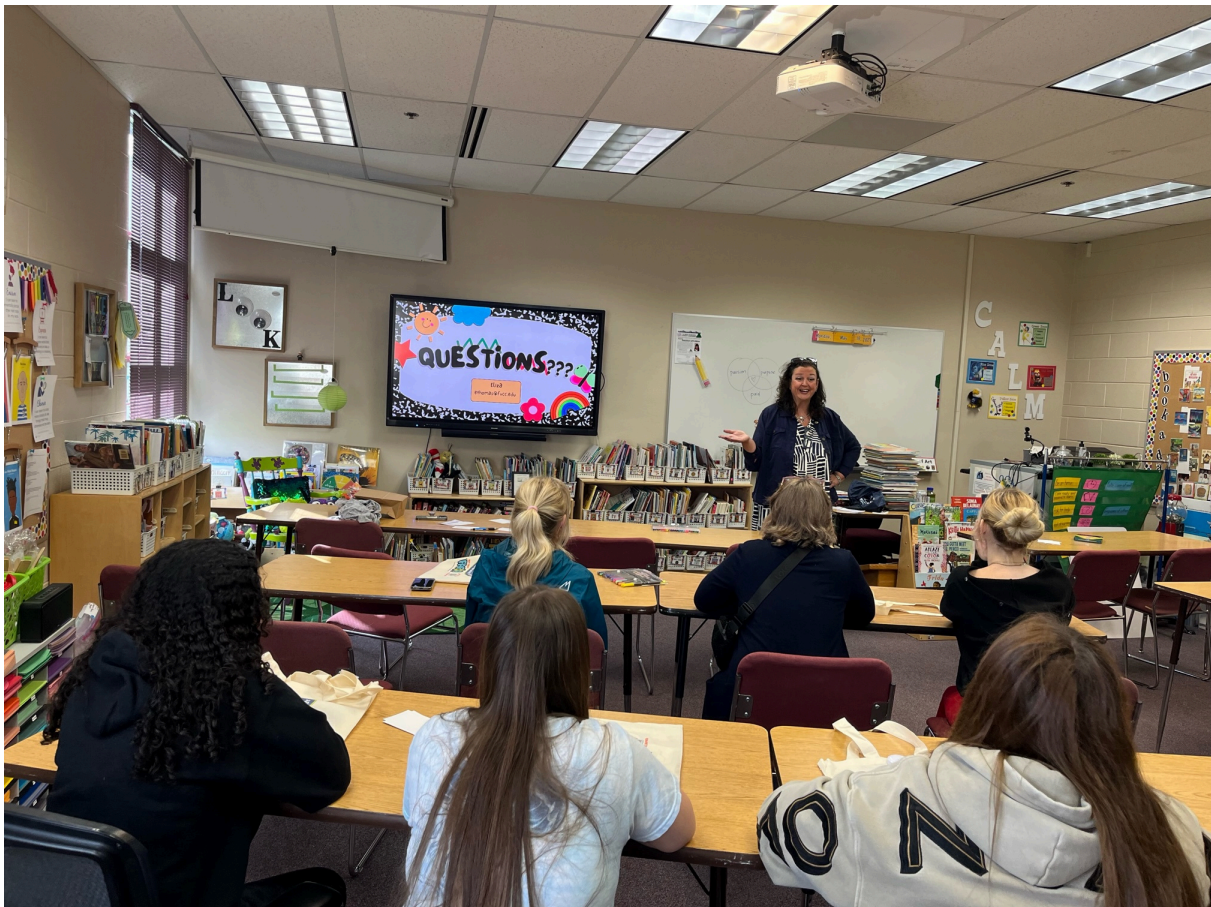
**Associate's Degree:** An academic degree conferred by a college upon completion of a two-year course of study (or about 60 required semester credits). It may be an Associate of Applied Science (AAS), an Associate of Science (AS) or an Associate of Arts (AA) degree.

**Bachelor's Degree:** An academic degree conferred by a college or university upon completion of a four-year program of study, requiring about 120 semester credits.

**Child Development Associate (CDA):** The Child Development Associate (CDA) is a credential awarded by the Council for Early Childhood Professional Recognition in Washington, D.C. The CDA credential may be achieved through informal training or through college course work that requires specific evidence of competency.

**Master's Degree:** A degree granted by a college or university upon completion of a prescribed program of study beyond the Bachelor's Degree. Some people interested in early childhood seek this degree in education, counseling, child and family studies, speech and language pathology, school psychology, special education or other related areas with an emphasis in early childhood.

**Doctorate:** The highest academic degree awarded by a college or university in a specific discipline. Individuals with an emphasis in the early childhood field might receive a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) or Doctor of Education (Ed.D).



# Higher Education Directory

Institution	Type	Location, MT	Degrees/Certificates Offered	URL
Montana State University	University	Bozeman	B.S. ECE P-3, Child Development; M.Ed. Curriculum & Instruction (ECE)	<a href="http://montana.edu">montana.edu</a>
University of Montana	University	Missoula	B.A. ECE P-3; M.Ed. Educational Leadership with ECE components;	<a href="http://umt.edu">umt.edu</a>
University of Montana Western	University	Dillon	B.S. ECE Pre-K-3 (online/hybrid); Certificate programs in Early	<a href="http://umwestern.edu">umwestern.edu</a>
Montana State University Billings	University	Billings	B.S. Elementary Ed with ECE minor; M.Ed. in Education; Certificate in	<a href="http://msubillings.edu">msubillings.edu</a>
Salish Kootenai College	Tribal College	Pablo	A.A., B.S. in ECE P-3; Certificate programs in Early Childhood	<a href="http://skc.edu">skc.edu</a>
Stone Child College	Tribal College	Box Elder	A.A., certificates in Education/Child Development	<a href="http://stonechild.edu">stonechild.edu</a>
Aaniih Nakoda College	Tribal College	Harlem	A.A., A.A.S., certificates in Early Childhood Education	<a href="http://ancollege.edu">ancollege.edu</a>
Blackfeet Community	Tribal College	Browning	A.A., A.A.S. with ECE emphasis; Certificates in Early Childhood	<a href="http://bfcc.edu">bfcc.edu</a>
Chief Dull Knife College	Tribal College	Lame Deer	A.A., A.A.S. in Education/ECE; Certificate options available	<a href="http://cdkc.edu">cdkc.edu</a>
Fort Peck Community	Tribal College	Poplar	A.A.S. in Early Childhood Education; Certificates in Child Development	<a href="http://fpcc.edu">fpcc.edu</a>
Little Big Horn College	Tribal College	Crow Agency	A.A. in Education with ECE focus; Certificate courses available	<a href="http://lbhc.edu">lbhc.edu</a>
Flathead Valley Community	Community College	Kalispell	A.A.S., A.A./A.S. in ECE & Child Development; Certificate programs	<a href="http://fvcc.edu">fvcc.edu</a>
Great Falls College MSU	Community College	Great Falls	A.A.S. in Early Childhood Education; Certificates in Child Development	<a href="http://gfcmsu.edu">gfcmsu.edu</a>
Dawson Community	Community College	Glendive	A.A.S. in ECE; Certificates; CDA prep	<a href="http://dawson.edu">dawson.edu</a>



# Partners



## Montana Early Childhood Project

- Montana Early Childhood Practitioner Registry and Training Calendar
- Incentive Programs including Pre-Apprenticeship, Apprenticeship, and Professional Development Awards
- Technical assistance operating the Early Childhood training approval system
- Support Professional Development Specialist workforce
- Montana Early Childhood Higher Education Consortium

[Website](#)



## SPARK Montana

- A tailored three-tier approach to address quality standards
- Personalized technical assistance and Help Desk to grow enrollment
- Resource rich and user-friendly Knowledge Hub, accessible 24/7
- Workforce fingerprinting services

[Website](#)



## Zero to Five Business Connect

- Business advising and technical assistance
- Business focused training and mentorship
- Shared services coordination and support
- Community capacity building technical assistance

[Website](#)



## Child Care Training

- In-person trainings plus over 100 virtual courses and trainings available for early childhood education workforce
- Statewide CPR/First Aid training and coordination
- Connects providers with Professional Development Specialists and other training resources
- Child care licensing training

[Website](#)

# Partners



## Montana Head Start Association

- Governed by a board comprised of program directors, staff and parent representatives.
- A dues paying professional organization for Head Start and Early Head Start programs in Montana

[Website](#)



## Head Start State Collaboration Office

- Provides a central point of contact and liaison between the state government and local Head Start/Early Head Start (EHS) programs and is funded by the federal Office of Head Start

[Website](#)



## Child Care Resources & Family Connections

- Best Beginnings Scholarship (BBS) support and administration
- Free family child care referrals
- Promote child care choice and access to quality early education opportunities

[Child Care Resources](#)

[Family Connections](#)



## Raise MT

- Advocate for the early childhood system and the families and children they serve.
- Initiate projects to support the early childhood professionals including the MT Trauma-Informed Early Childhood Advisory Coalition.
- Educate policy makers, businesses, and the public on early childhood issues.

[Website](#)

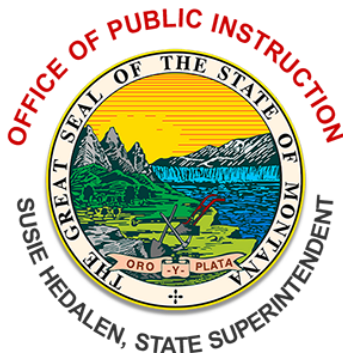
# Partners



## MT Association for the Education of Young Children (MtAEYC)

- Supports early childhood professionals and quality early childhood services through education, advocacy and networking and is a dues paying professional organization.

[Website](#)



## Office of Public Instruction (OPI)

- Provides vision, advocacy, support and leadership for schools and communities to ensure that all students meet today's challenges and tomorrow's opportunities

[Website](#)



## The Montana Family Child Care Network

- Collaboration of early childhood interests, who represent Montana's Family Child Care Educators
- Advocates with united voices on behalf of all children, families, and family childcare educators to promote and encourage quality professional family childcare and early education through professional education, mentoring, and advocacy.

[Website](#)

# Partners



## DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (MT DPHHS):  
Early Childhood & Family Support Division

**Mission:** To improve the quality, affordability and accessibility of early care and education in Montana, with focused efforts on coordinated systems to best meet the needs of young children, their families, and the professionals who work on behalf of young children and families.

**Vision:** Affordable and accessible child care in Montana

### Our Programs:

Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship  
Child & Adult Care Food Program  
Child Care Licensing  
Child Care Referral  
Head Start  
Montana Bright Futures Birth to Five  
Montana Milestones  
Quality Initiatives

[Website](#)



### **Montana Milestone/Part C Services**

Montana's comprehensive system of early intervention services and supports for families who have infants or toddlers, from birth through three who have significant developmental delays or disabilities or have been diagnosed with an established condition associated with significant delays in development.

[Website](#)

### **Child Care Licensing**

The role of the Child Care Licensing (CCL) program is to monitor, inspect, and support licensed and registered childcare facilities, as well as those working to become licensed or registered. Additionally, CCL establishes regulations for the health, safety, and well-being of the children in these facilities. All licensed or registered programs receive the following: a pre-inspection prior to providing care, ongoing monitoring, annual inspections, and investigation into any complaints that are received.

[Website](#)

# Partners Map

## CHILD CARE DEVELOPMENT FUND PROGRAMS Child Care Partners



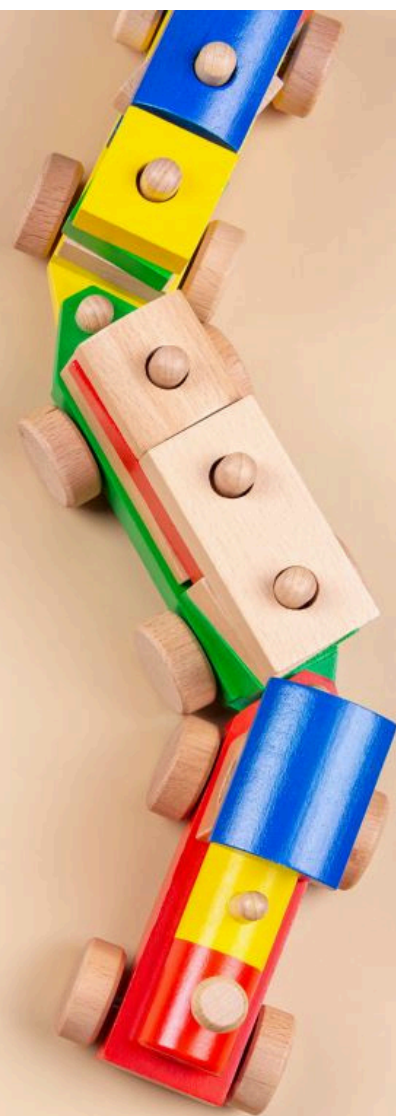
DEPARTMENT OF  
PUBLIC HEALTH &  
HUMAN SERVICES



MONTANA CHILD CARE BUSINESS  
CONNECT



family  
connections



This document highlights the Child Care Development Fund Programs that are all partners here for you. Use this resource to help you navigate through the services and resources that each program provides.

# CHILD CARE DEVELOPMENT FUND PROGRAMS

## Meet our Child Care Partners



DEPARTMENT OF  
**PUBLIC HEALTH &  
HUMAN SERVICES**

Early Childhood & Family Support Division

[childcare.mt.gov](http://childcare.mt.gov)

### WORKFORCE AND TRAINING



- Incentive Programs including Pre-Apprenticeship, Apprenticeship, and Professional Development Awards
- Montana Early Childhood Practitioner Registry and Training Calendar
- Technical assistance operating the Early Childhood training approval system
- Support Professional Development Specialist workforce

[mtecp.org](http://mtecp.org)



**ChildCareTraining**  
Early Childhood Online Education

- In-person trainings plus over 100 virtual courses and trainings available for early childhood education workforce
- Statewide CPR/First Aid training and coordination
- Connects providers with Professional Development Specialists and other training resources
- Child care licensing training

[childcaretraining.org](http://childcaretraining.org)

### SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES

- Best Beginnings Scholarship (BBS) support and administration
- Support for children with special needs and children in foster care
- Free family child care referrals
- Promote child care choice and access to quality early education opportunities

[childcareresources.org](http://childcareresources.org)  
 [familyconnectionsmt.org](http://familyconnectionsmt.org)



SCAN to view an interactive map of our family support contractor service areas.

### PROVIDER & BUSINESS SERVICES



- Business advising and technical assistance
- Business focused training and mentorship
- Shared services coordination and support
- Community capacity building technical assistance

[childcarebusinessconnect.com](http://childcarebusinessconnect.com)



**SPARK**  
MONTANA

- A tailored three-tier approach to address quality standards
- Personalized technical assistance and Help Desk to grow enrollment
- Resource rich and user-friendly Knowledge Hub, accessible 24/7
- Workforce fingerprinting services

[sparkmontana.com](http://sparkmontana.com)

# Notes

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# Glossary

**Accreditation:** Programs may receive accreditation that requires completion of a comprehensive review process on a regular basis.

- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) for center-based child care/preschool program.
- National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) for family or group child care home.
- Public schools, colleges and universities are accredited by specific organizations.

\* Your college must be regionally accredited by the U.S. Department of Education so that your credits or degree will be recognized by the Montana University System, OPI and The Montana Practitioner Registry.

**Career Path:** A framework that outlines levels of professionalism in early childhood for practitioners serving children birth – age eight in Montana. The Practitioner Registry verifies education, training and experience and places practitioners at a level on the Career Path. It is administered by the Early Childhood Project at MSU.

**Certification:** A document that verifies completion of training and/or education. Certificates may be awarded for an approved informal training (i.e., workshop) or for a course that is offered through a community-based agency, professional organization or a college or university.

**Child Care Center:** State licensed early childhood programs serving children birth to age 12 with 16 or more children on a regular basis.

**College Credit:** Granted by colleges and universities for coursework completed. They may be semester or quarter credits depending upon the institution. Quarter credits may be converted to semester credits by dividing the total by 1.5. A semester credit equals 15 hours of instruction time.

\* Your college must be regionally accredited by the U.S. Department of Education so that your credits or degree will be recognized by the Montana University System, OPI and The Montana Practitioner Registry.

**Colleges and Universities:** Regionally accredited institutions of higher education offer college coursework that leads to a certificate or degree. (See Page 10)

**Continuing Education Units (CEUs):** Continuing Education Units are granted by colleges or universities. One CEU equals 10 hours of instruction time. Four and a half (4.5) CEUs or three semester college credits are required for renewal of a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential after the first three years from the credential award date (and then every five years after the first renewal).

**Course:** Usually refers to a class offered over a period of time for more in-depth study of a specific topic, often offered for credit, CEUs or a certificate depending on the sponsor.

**Credential:** Public school elementary teachers often refer to their certificate as a teaching credential. There is also a CDA credential (see above).

# Glossary

**Drop In:** drop in child care facilities provide care for children in an out-of-home setting on an unscheduled or on-demand basis while parents attend discreet activities like meetings, appointments, or leisure activities

**Distance Learning:** Professional development opportunities that are not place-bound may include correspondence courses, online or a combination of distance and classroom.

**Early Head Start:** Federally funded comprehensive early childhood program serving income eligible pregnant women, families, infants and toddlers up to age 3.

**Endorsement:** A special designation added to a teaching certificate indicating a specific area of emphasis.

**Early Childhood Education Workforce:** Early Childhood Education Workforce includes those working with young children (infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and school age children in centers, homes, and schools) and their families, including agencies, organizations, and institutions of higher education, with a primary mission of supporting young children's development and learning.

**Family Child Care Home:** State registered program serving three to eight children in a home setting with one caregiver with no more than three children under the age of two. The caregiver's own children count in this number if not attending school fun time.

**FFN:** providers provide care in a private residence either for a sibling group of any size or for no more than six children from separate households.

**Group Child Care Home:** State registered program serving nine to fifteen children with two caregivers and no more than six under the age of two. The caregiver's own children count in this number if not attending school fun time

**Head Start:** Federally funded comprehensive early childhood program serving income eligible children ages 3-5 and their families.

**Knowledge Base:** The Montana guide for professional practice for practitioners working with children birth through age eight that defines what practitioners need to know, be able to do and understand. It is published in a self-assessment booklet format and is the foundation of the early care and education career development program.

**Post-Secondary:** A term that refers to higher education coursework beyond high school.

**Practitioner Registry:** The Registry recognizes professional development for early care and education professionals and is managed by the Early Childhood Project.

**Professional Development Specialist:** creates and facilitates training to Montana providers. A PDS can create and post their training to the Montana Practitioner Registry statewide training calendar for approved hours.

**RCE:** RCE Providers provide care in a private residence either for a sibling group of any size or for no more than two children from separate households

**School-Age Program:** school Age Care Facilities provide care on a regular basis only to school-age children and during out-of-school time hours

**Training Approval:** A system to review and approve professional development, not for college credit, in Montana through the Early Childhood Project

# Resources



## Who We Are - Career Workbook

### What We Do - Montana Early Learning Standards

This publication describes the standards that guide the work of early childhood professionals to ensure that children from birth to age eight have the skills and knowledge they need to achieve success in learning to reach their full potential in life. The Montana Early Learning Standards (MELS) feature a continuum of developmental progression without listing specific ages. A careful read of the Introduction and Early Learning Principles will help you understand how to use the standards in appropriate ways as you work (and play!) with young children and their families.

### How We do it - Knowledge Base

A guide to early care and education professional practice: What early childhood practitioners who work with young children and families need to know, understand, and be able to do. The Montana Early Care and Education Knowledge Base was first published in July 1998, with a recent revision in 2022, as the foundation from which to build the state's comprehensive early childhood career development program. All components of the program are directly linked to the Knowledge Base.

**Access all resources at the following weblink or QR Code:**

## ECP Publications











# Acknowledgments

The Montana Early Childhood Project wishes to acknowledge all the dedicated individuals who contributed to the revisions of this document. Special thanks to the Bright Futures Birth to Five team for this printing.



DEPARTMENT OF  
**PUBLIC HEALTH &  
HUMAN SERVICES**



*It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in  
creative expression and knowledge.*

*~Albert Einstein*