

# Every Montana child needs to start life with the *Best Beginning* possible

The message below has been compiled by early childhood experts across the state to communicate to a wide audience the importance of the early years and how everyone plays a role in meeting the needs of our communities' children.

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- + Supportive families
- + High quality early care and education programs
- + Engaged communities
- = Children Ready for Life and Learning

## It all adds up.

Scientists and economic development experts agree investments in quality early care and education are essential for our children, our community, and our future.

## Children Ready for Life and Learning:

- Thrive from “rich” early experiences which provide the foundation for the construction of sturdy brain architecture.
- Benefit from intellectually stimulating learning environments that allow for play and active exploration so that children can develop a broad range of skills and learning capacities.
- Need safe, healthy, and supportive environments that provide physical and emotional security.
- Need stable and responsive relationships with nurturing adults to enhance children’s learning and social and emotional development.
- Benefit from adults in their lives who form reciprocal relationships to provide for their needs.
- Need adequate nutrition, good eating habits, and physical activity (including the mother before and during pregnancy).

An investment in *Best Beginnings* has the power to transform lifelong outcomes for all children.

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## Supportive Families:

- Provide economic stability.
- Connect to the community where they live, work, learn, and play.
- Utilize supports to raise healthy and competent children in a safe and secure environment.
- Make flexible adjustments to natural, social and economic challenges.

## High Quality Early Care and Education Programs:

- Recognize and respect parents as their child's first teacher and commit to building strong parent/teacher partnerships.
- Provide developmentally appropriate academics and social and emotional guidance.
- Understand and respect how ethnicity, language and culture provide the rich context in which children learn.
- Individualize instruction and strategies to support each child to reach their highest potential.
- Hire and support qualified teachers and staff and are committed to professional development.
- Commit to using best practices that are evidenced based.
- Provide the foundation for community prosperity that depends upon a well-educated, ready workforce; educating a workforce starts early.

## Engaged Communities:

- Strengthen the foundation of the family through healthy environments that include safe neighborhoods, voluntary associations, libraries, parks and affordable recreation, high-quality early childhood programs and public schools, community events.
- Provide access to affordable and adequate housing.
- Partner with businesses to provide time and commitment, financial and institutional resources, and skills and knowledge to insure community prosperity.
- Embrace innovation and are responsive to the individual needs of all families.
- Acknowledge that children are nested in families and communities with unique strengths.

## Comprehensive Services:

- Promote the well being of all families through community development, early intervention services, child care, community based and collaborative social services, employment opportunities, supportive workplace policies, access to primary health care (mental health, medical and dental).
- Develop and support policies that enhance the capacity of care givers and communities to meet family needs in multiple settings in which children live, learn, and play.
- Recognize the importance of a child's home language, family structure and home culture.

## References

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