

EXHIBIT 6
DATE 2-4-05
HB 462

February 4, 2005

RE: HB462

Chairperson Becker and Members of the House Human Services Committee:

Thank you for hearing testimony today regarding House Bill 462. My name is Kerry Williams, I am from Bozeman, and I was the facilitator for the creation of Montana's Early Learning Guidelines. I earned a master's degree in early childhood education from MSU, and I most recently worked at the Early Childhood Project, helping to coordinate continuing education efforts for people working in child care and related occupations. I am now the mother of an eleven-month-old boy. I would like to express my support for HB462.

I support this bill because, while "school readiness" has become a fashionable buzzword for all sorts of ideas on how children may best be prepared to enter our public school system, the fact is that, without well-trained and well-compensated early childhood professionals and well-informed families, our children will have a difficult time entering school ready to learn.

Montana recently went through a unique and inclusive process, where representatives from a wide range of occupations, including child care workers, public school personnel, and parents, came together to put into words what school readiness looks like. The result of this effort is an effective and easy-to-use tool called "Montana's Early Learning Guidelines." This document not only gives adults concrete goals to aim for in their work with children, it also offers a variety of ways to recognize progress in a child's ongoing development and suggestions for how to support a child in meeting those goals.

Montana's Early Learning Guidelines address what children ages three to five need to know, understand and be able to do by the time they reach kindergarten. Now, you may think this document will be full of checklists indicating such acquired skills as: knowing the alphabet, or being able to count to ten, or coloring inside the lines. But, the truth is, a child does not need these skills when they walk in the doors of our public schools. What a child needs is a love of learning, respect for other people, and curiosity in the world around them. I have included with

my testimony information from the National Center for Education Statistics, which surveyed kindergarten teachers on the most important elements for school readiness. The top three are: that a child be physically healthy, rested and well-nourished; be able to communicate needs, wants, and thoughts verbally; and be enthusiastic and curious in approaching new activities. These are building blocks that are cultivated long before entering school, and they are crucial to the success of our children throughout their entire lives.

In order to help students get the most out their schooling, we must support efforts to make sure the places our young children spend their days are safe, nurturing, and supportive of their natural eagerness to learn. The most effective way to do this is to get information to the adults who live and work with young children on developmentally appropriate ways to foster children's intellectual, physical, and social growth. Using Montana's Early Learning Guidelines as a basis for understanding, this State can become a leader in the training of early childhood professionals, and make a long-term, worthwhile investment in the future of both teachers and the children they care for each day. It's an investment that will pay back all of the Montana's citizens over and over again.

We have an extraordinary tool in Montana's Early Learning Guidelines, ready and waiting to help adults make the most of this important time in a young child's life. As a mother, I would feel much more confident in my child's care and education, knowing that the adults in his life had received targeted training and commensurate compensation around these fundamental issues. Let's not pass up this opportunity to make sure that appropriate school readiness information gets put into practice in an effective, sustainable, and timely manner. Thank you very much.

National Center for Education Statistics

The following is information on school readiness from the National Center for Education Statistics, the primary federal entity for collecting and analyzing data that are related to education in the United States and other nations.

Teachers' Ratings of Important Qualities for Kindergarten Readiness

Teachers completing the survey were asked how important each of 15 stated qualities was for a child to be ready for kindergarten. After assigning a level of importance to each quality, teachers were asked to select the three qualities they felt were most essential for a child to be ready for kindergarten.

Most Important Qualities

The top three qualities public school kindergarten teachers consider essential for school readiness are that a child:

- **be physically healthy, rested and well-nourished;**
- **be able to communicate needs, wants, and thoughts verbally; and**
- **be enthusiastic and curious in approaching new activities.**

These three qualities are the same qualities to which the highest proportion of teachers gave individual ratings of "very important" or "essential." According to teachers, the most important factor for kindergarten readiness is for a child to be physically healthy, rested, and well-nourished; 96 percent of public school kindergarten teachers rated this quality as very important or essential. This was followed by an ability to communicate needs, wants, and thoughts verbally (84 percent) and enthusiasm and curiosity in approaching new activities (76 percent).

More than half the teachers also place significant importance on the ability to follow directions (60 percent), not being disruptive in class (60 percent), being sensitive to other children's feelings (58 percent) and the ability to take turns and share (56 percent). Of less importance are knowing English (42 percent), the ability to sit still and pay attention (42 percent), and finishing tasks (40 percent).

Of least importance according to kindergarten teachers are good problem-solving skills (24 percent), the ability to identify primary colors and basic shapes (24 percent), the ability to use pencils and paint brushes (21 percent), knowledge of the alphabet (10 percent), and the ability to count to 20 (7 percent).

Taken from the website: <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/frss/publications/93410/3.asp> on February 4, 2005.

