

PRESCHOOL

LEGISLATOR NOTICE

The Legislative Services Division is required to offer a brief history on the subject matter of a bill draft request prior to drafting. (5-4-105, MCA; [Chapter 309, Laws of 2017](#)) The history must include related legislation introduced over the last five sessions and hyperlinks to the bill, hearing information, and fiscal notes. The legislation links below open to the page showing the status and history of bills introduced on this topic in the past. The bill text and any related fiscal notes can be accessed through the link at the top of that page.

Legislation can be complex, and this history is not intended to be exhaustive. Please contact the drafter of the requested bill for more information.

Background Materials and Research

Topic Summary:

In recent years a number of states have increased their investment in early childhood education. The conversation in Montana was stimulated by Governor Bullock through his Early Edge proposal in 2015, which included a request in the 2017 Biennium Executive Budget for \$18.5 million/year in FY 2016 and FY 2017 “to provide early education for 4-year olds in Montana.”

The proposal also requested the following language to be included in HB 2: "Early Childhood Education may only be used by the office of public instruction to distribute block grants for voluntary, high-quality, pre-kindergarten for 4-year olds. School districts may partner with Head Start, local child care centers, family child care providers, or provide services within district facilities." There was no proposed legislation outlining the program beyond the preceding language and the budget proposal was rejected by the 2015 Legislature.

In 2017, legislation creating a preschool grant program was proposed, but tabled in House Education. However, late in the session a new “hospital community benefit assessment” was created, temporarily raising \$3 million/year from assessments on 14 hospitals around the state. This \$3 million was then directed to DPHHS to “expand the [Stars to Quality] program and increase access to preschool for 4- and 5-year-old children” as a two-year pilot program. Stars to Quality was an existing QRIS (Quality Rating and Improvement System) aimed at incentivizing quality improvements to early childhood centers and providers.

In 2019, two very different legislative proposals for state-funded preschool programs were considered by the Legislature, but neither were enacted, and the Stars Preschool Pilot Program terminated. The 2019-2020 Education Interim Committee devoted considerable time to exploring the topic but was unable to reach consensus on a committee proposal amid the

coronavirus pandemic and concerns about reduced state revenue. In 2021, a preschool proposal was debated on the Senate floor very late in the session before failing to pass 2nd reading.

Legislative Services Division Materials:

[2019-2020 Education Interim Committee Preschool webpage](#)

[Preschool Reference Document \(January 2020\)](#)

Other Materials:

[NCSL Early Learning webpage](#)

[A Fair Start: Ensuring All Students are Ready to Learn](#) (NCSL report)

[Preschool policy considerations](#) (NCSL slides)

[How States Fund Pre-K](#) (Education Commission of the States)

Introduced Legislation

*Chapter number assigned means bill was passed and approved.

2021

SENATE BILL NO. 342 – (S) Died in Process -- AN ACT GENERALLY REVISING EDUCATION LAWS RELATED TO PUBLIC PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS; REVISING THE DEFINITION OF "PUPIL"; ALLOWING PRESCHOOL PUPILS TO BE INCLUDED IN AVERAGE NUMBER BELONGING CALCULATIONS; ELIMINATING THE BAR AGAINST USING STATE EQUALIZATION AID TO PROVIDE FUNDING FOR PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS; AMENDING SECTIONS 20-1-101, 20-1-301, 20-5-101, 20-7-117, AND 20-9-311, MCA; AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

2019

[HOUSE BILL NO. 225](#) - (H) Died in Standing Committee -- AN ACT GENERALLY REVISING PUBLIC SCHOOL FUNDING LAWS; ALIGNING THE MONTANA PUBLIC SCHOOL FUNDING FORMULA WITH THE BASIC SYSTEM OF FREE QUALITY PUBLIC ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS AS REFERENCED IN THE MONTANA CONSTITUTION AND MONTANA STATUTES; REVISING THE DEFINITION OF PUPIL TO INCLUDE 4-YEAR-OLDS VOLUNTARILY ENROLLED BY THEIR PARENTS IN PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS ESTABLISHED AT THE DISCRETION OF TRUSTEES; TRANSFERRING ADMINISTRATION OF THE QUALITY EDUCATOR LOAN ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FROM THE BOARD OF REGENTS TO THE SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION; ALLOWING TRUSTEES TO ENROLL 4-YEAR-OLDS IN PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS AND GENERATE ANB FUNDING BASED ON A MAXIMUM OF HALF-TIME ENROLLMENT AND INCLUDING ENROLLED PRESCHOOL STUDENTS AS ELIGIBLE TRANSPORTEES; APPLYING INFLATIONARY ADJUSTMENTS TO SCHOOL FUNDING COMPONENTS AND ADDING THE SPECIAL EDUCATION ALLOWABLE COST PAYMENT TO THOSE SCHOOL FUNDING COMPONENTS RECEIVING INFLATIONARY ADJUSTMENTS; PROVIDING AN APPROPRIATION; PROVIDING FOR

DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS; AMENDING SECTIONS 20-1-101, 20-4-501, 20-4-505, 20-4-506, 20-5-101, 20-6-508, 20-7-117, 20-9-306, 20-9-311, 20-9-313, 20-9-326, AND 20-10-101, MCA; AND PROVIDING EFFECTIVE DATES.

[HOUSE BILL NO. 755](#) - (H) Died in Standing Committee -- AN ACT GENERALLY REVISING EDUCATION LAWS RELATED TO PRESCHOOL; CREATING A DEPARTMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD WITHIN THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH AND A DIRECTOR OF EARLY CHILDHOOD; PROVIDING LEGISLATIVE INTENT; CREATING THE MONTANA SCHOOL-READY PRESCHOOL PROGRAM; PROVIDING DEFINITIONS AND GUIDELINES FOR THE PROGRAM AND DESCRIBING FUNDING FOR PARTICIPATING PROVIDERS; OUTLINING DUTIES FOR THE OFFICE OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION; PROVIDING THE DIRECTOR OF EARLY CHILDHOOD WITH RULEMAKING AUTHORITY AND REQUIRING THE DIRECTOR TO ADOPT RULES FOR THE PROGRAM; ESTABLISHING AN EARLY CHILDHOOD COORDINATING COUNCIL; CLARIFYING UNDER WHAT EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES A SCHOOL DISTRICT MAY ADMIT STUDENTS OUTSIDE REGULAR AGE PARAMETERS; REVISING THE DEFINITION OF ELIGIBLE TRANSPORTEE; PROVIDING RULEMAKING AUTHORITY; PROVIDING APPROPRIATIONS; AMENDING SECTIONS 2-15-104, 20-5-101, 20-7-117, 20-9-306, 20-9-313, AND 20-10-101, MCA; AND PROVIDING AN IMMEDIATE EFFECTIVE DATE.

2017

[HOUSE BILL NO. 563](#) - (H) Died in Standing Committee -- AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE MONTANA PRESCHOOL GRANT PROGRAM; PROVIDING DEFINITIONS AND ELIGIBILITY FOR THE PROGRAM; CREATING THE BRIGHT START FOR MONTANA KIDS BOARD TO ADMINISTER THE PROGRAM; PROVIDING REQUIREMENTS FOR GRANT ELIGIBILITY AND REPORTING; AMENDING THE DEFINITION OF "ELIGIBLE TRANSPORTEE" TO INCLUDE PRESCHOOL PUPILS; PROVIDING AN APPROPRIATION; AMENDING SECTION 20-10-101, MCA; AND PROVIDING AN IMMEDIATE EFFECTIVE DATE AND AN APPLICABILITY DATE.

[HOUSE BILL NO. 639](#) - Chapter Number Assigned -- AN ACT REVISING FUNDING FOR HEALTH CARE SERVICES; ADJUSTING THE CONVERSION FACTOR FOR PHYSICIAN SERVICES REIMBURSEMENT; IMPLEMENTING PROVISIONS OF THE GENERAL APPROPRIATIONS ACT; PROVIDING MEDICAID CASELOAD RESTRICTIONS; PROVIDING LIMITATIONS ON TRANSFERS OF FUNDING FOR THE MONTANA DEVELOPMENTAL CENTER; ESTABLISHING A TEMPORARY COMMUNITY BENEFIT ASSESSMENT FOR CERTAIN HOSPITALS; PROVIDING FOR A STATUTORY APPROPRIATION; AMENDING SECTIONS 17-7-502 AND 53-6-125, MCA; AND PROVIDING EFFECTIVE DATES AND A TERMINATION DATE.

2015 – No introduced legislation in 2015. See explanation of budget proposal above.

2013 – No introduced legislation in 2013.

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