

Preschool Building Blocks in Montana

prepared for the Education Interim Committee, November 2017, by Pad McCracken, LSD Research Analyst

There are roughly 12,000 children in each age cohort, birth through age 5, in Montana (about 12,000 three-year-olds, 12,000 four-year-olds, etc.). Three-, four-, and five-year-olds participate in preschool through a variety of programs.*

Community-Based Providers

Child care providers serving infants and young children are generally licensed in Montana; however, preschool providers serving only 3-5 year olds are not licensed in Montana, so it is difficult to know how many programs exist or the total number of children served by these community-based preschool providers.

School District Programs

Individual school districts may offer preschool programs at the trustees' discretion and may not use state funds. Programs must meet the Montana Preschool Accreditation Standards established by the Board of Public Education. 105 school districts report serving about **450** kids.

Head Start

Comprehensive, federally funded child development program for low-income families. 20 programs in MT serve about **5,000** 3- and 4-year-olds.

Special Education Preschool

Federal requirements and funding for children with disabilities from birth IDEA Part B—over **1,600** kids ages 3-5 are served by school districts

New State-Supported Preschool Pilot Programs

Provides OTO funding--\$3 million in each year of 2019 biennium to DPHHS "to expand [the Stars to Quality program]ⁱ and increase access to preschool for 4- and 5-year-old children. The department shall use the money to create and support pilot programs to test multiple delivery models, including public programs, private programs, and mixed delivery programs through public-private partnerships. The department may use funds to support preschool programs, including startup and training costs. In establishing the pilot programs, the department shall ensure that pilot programs are included in programs in rural and urban areas. The department shall file a report with the 2019 legislature and present the report to the education and local government committee, the legislative finance committee, and the children, families, health, and human services committee by September 1, 2018." (Approx. **300** kids)

Montana Preschool Development Grant (MPDG)

Montana is one of 18 states that has received a federal Preschool Development Grant. Montana was awarded \$10 million a year for up to four years [FY 15, 16, 17, & 18]. The Preschool Development Grant competition supports states to: (1) Build or enhance preschool programs for the delivery of high-quality preschool services to children, and (2) Expand access to high-quality preschool programs in targeted communities. The MPDG is jointly implemented by the Governor's Office, the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) and the Department of Health and Human Services (DPHHS.) Free preschool is currently available to 4-year-olds from low- and moderate income families in Anaconda, Bozeman, Boulder, Browning, Butte, Crow, Fort Belknap, Fort Peck, Great Falls, Hardin, Helena, Kalispell, Lame Deer, Lewistown, Libby, Rocky Boy, Ronan, and Pablo. These programs serve about **1,200** preschool aged children each year.

ⁱ <http://dphhs.mt.gov/hcsd/Childcare/starspreschool>

*The most recent [NIEER State Preschool Yearbook](#) estimates about 1 in 4 Montana 4-year-olds is enrolled in preschool through Head Start, MPDG programs, or through Special Education Preschool.