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Education Interim Committee

66th Montana Legislature

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TO: Education Interim Committee
FROM: Pad McCracken, Staff
RE: Students enrolled in "K-1" programs through "exceptional circumstances"
DATE: June 1, 2020

The topic of "K-1" or "Running Start" kindergarten classrooms has come up during the committee's exploration of pre-kindergarten this interim. We visited a Running Start Kindergarten classroom at Whittier Elementary School in Bozeman in November. At your April 30 meeting, Rep. Vinton asked about the number of children being served in these classrooms statewide and the state cost. This memo and the attached documents address that question.

Background

Montana law at [20-7-117](#) allows districts to create preschool programs for 3- and 4-year old children, but prohibits the district from using "state equalization aid" in funding the programs. The term "state equalization aid" is something of an artifact from an earlier Montana school finance era, but you can think of it as more or less synonymous with BASE aid. Additionally, preschool pupils in programs established under 20-7-117 are not allowed to be included in ANB calculations as stated in [20-9-311\(7\)](#). The legislature's message to districts in a nutshell: You can offer preschool, but it's on your own dime.

Trustees are allowed under [20-5-101\(3\)](#) to admit a child under age 5 if there are "exceptional circumstances" but just what circumstances qualify as exceptional are not defined in statute.

In the summer of 2015, the Montana School Boards Association (MTSBA) issued [guidance and model policies](#) to districts demonstrating how districts could utilize this exceptional circumstances provision to admit children under age 5 into kindergarten programs and include them in enrollment counts and ANB calculations, thereby generating increased budget authority and state and local funding through the school funding formula. [Additional guidance](#) from Dennis Parman, then Deputy Superintendent at OPI, made it clear that in order to qualify for ANB funding under the law, these

programs could not be preschool programs in form or substance. A number of districts have created "K-1" or "Running Start Kindergarten" classrooms since 2016.

Numbers and Cost

The attached tables display the number of children under 5 years old (using the September 10 cutoff date) enrolled in schools and included in ANB calculations by school district. The districts are grouped by county. IMPORTANT NOTE: The numbers are not purely children in K-1 or Running Start classrooms. These are all students under 5 years old who are included in ANB counts. One symptom of the lack of a system approach is poor data.

You can see that prior to 2016 and MTSBA's guidance, there were students under 5 enrolled, likely kids whose birthdays were shortly after September 10 whose parents advocated for them to be able to attend kindergarten a year early. The statewide numbers increase in 2016 following MTSBA's guidance, then level off during 2018 and 2019, and then increase again in 2020. The leveling off is likely due to several districts participating in the STARS Preschool Pilot Program during those two years (see Bozeman, Libby, and Browning) and then moving back to K-1 programs when that pilot ended, as well as more districts starting to offer K-1 programs.

I asked OPI for an estimate of the state cost for these 556 students under 5 years old (again they are not all in K-1 classrooms, but it appears the majority likely are). The estimate is about \$1.4 million for FY 2020.

		Pupils Under Age 5 Included in ANB Counts 2013-2020							
Co Name	Le Name	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Beaverhead	Dillon Elem							1	
Beaverhead	Lima K-12 Schools						1		
Beaverhead	Wisdom Elem							1	
Beaverhead	Reichle Elem	1	1						
Big Horn	Pryor Elem								4
Big Horn	Hardin Elem	1	2					3	
Big Horn	Wyola Elem	1							1
Blaine	Harlem Elem					1	1		
Blaine	Zurich Elem			1					
Blaine	Hays-Lodge Pole K-12 Schls							1	
Broadwater	Townsend K-12 Schools						1		
Carbon	Bridger K-12 Schools				10	6	12	7	10
Carbon	Joliet Elem		1					2	
Carbon	Fromberg K-12					9	8	9	8
Carbon	Luther Elem		1						
Carter	Ekalaka Elem	1							
Cascade	Great Falls Elem	4	2	6	4	1	5	1	
Cascade	Cascade Elem				9	6	14	8	13
Cascade	Centerville Elem								16
Cascade	Belt Elem					1	24		17
Cascade	Vaughn Elem				6	7	7	10	12
Cascade	Ulm Elem				12	7	11	10	11
Cascade	Sun River Valley Elem			6	15	6	7	8	10
Chouteau	Fort Benton Elem								7
Chouteau	Highwood K-12					1		1	
Chouteau	Geraldine K-12	1		1					4
Chouteau	Carter Elem	1							
Custer	Kircher Elem						1		
Daniels	Scobey K-12 Schools							0	1
Dawson	Glendive Elem	1	1						
Dawson	Deer Creek Elem		1						
Deer Lodge	Anaconda Elem	2							
Fergus	Grass Range Elem							3	5
Fergus	Denton Elem		1					1	
Fergus	Winifred K-12 Schools							1	
Flathead	Deer Park Elem		2					1	
Flathead	Fair-Mont-Egan Elem	1	1				1		
Flathead	Kalispell Elem	2		1				1	1
Flathead	Columbia Falls Elem	5		3	5	8	8	6	4
Flathead	Cayuse Prairie Elem						8	11	12
Flathead	Helena Flats Elem								8
Flathead	Kila Elem						1		
Flathead	Pleasant Valley Elem								2
Flathead	Bigfork Elem		8	9	9	7	2	10	7
Flathead	Whitefish Elem			1	1		1	1	1
Flathead	Evergreen Elem		16	15	16	15	17	14	14

		Pupils Under Age 5 Included in ANB Counts 2013-2020								
Co Name	Le Name	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	
Yellowstone	Elder Grove Elem					1				
Yellowstone	Elysian Elem						0			
Yellowstone	Huntley Project K-12 Schools	1								
Yellowstone	Shepherd Elem	1						1		
Yellowstone	Independent Elem	1								
Yellowstone	Lockwood K-12								20	
Total # of Pupils		57	60	76	184	265	271	304	556	
Total # of Districts		41	29	23	32	45	50	55	66	

Education Interim Committee
June 18-19, 2020
Students enrolled in "K-1" programs through "exceptional
circumstances" Exhibit 31