_____**School District**

FLEXIBILITY AND EFFICIENCY

Early Childhood Education Enrollment Exceptional Circumstances

It is the policy of the District to provide enhanced educational opportunities to students under the age of 5 when either individual exceptional circumstances exist and/or when Community-Based exceptional circumstances are present.

Prohibition: *This policy cannot be used to provide what is otherwise characterized or referred to as a pre-school, pursuant to20-7-117(2), MCA, which specifically prohibits the use of state equalization aid for preschool. This policy is intended for use to enroll students under the age of 5 when statutory criteria are met.*

Exceptional Circumstances Meriting Waiver of Age Requirements for Pupils
Note: In order to adopt this policy, the board of trustees must select one or more of the characteristics identified in either Option A or Option B.

The administration shall ensure admission, enrollment and assignment of all qualifying children referenced in this policy. The administration shall place children enrolled pursuant to this policy in either a half-time or full-time kindergarten program as an integral part of the elementary school program. The administration shall also ensure provision of a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment possible, pursuant to terms of each student's individualized education program, for all children enrolled under this policy who are qualified for services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

The administration shall include children enrolled pursuant to this policy in the district's calculation of average number belonging (ANB) as reported to OPI.

Option A, Student-Specific Exceptional Circumstances: To be used when the board of trustees wants to define exceptional circumstances specific to the individual characteristics of each student or sub-group of students.

The Board of Trustees declares the following to be qualifying "exceptional circumstances" within the meaning of that term as used in Section 20-5-101(3), MCA, that merit waiving the age provisions of Section 20-5-101(1), MCA for qualifying children under 6 years of age. These qualifying exceptional circumstances are based on the educationally relevant factors to establish a basic system of free quality public elementary and secondary school specified in Section 20-9-309, MCA and as required by Article X, section 1, of the Montana Constitution:

Note: Each of the below should be considered separately for inclusion or exclusion in the Board's adopted policy. Note: When enrolling on the basis of an individual student's characteristics under this Option A, the District must be sure to document each qualifying student's characteristics to ensure that criteria listed in this portion of the policy can be substantiated.

1. A child at least 3 years of age with a disability qualifying the child for services under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.
2. A child who is 4 years of age or older on or before September 10 of the school year in which enrollment is to occur who:

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9. The following circumstances exist within the community affecting student learning identified by the local board of trustees pursuant to Section 20-9-309(2)(h), MCA, and identified within federal law pursuant to Section 20-9-309(4)(a)(v), MCA, including but not limited to educational priorities identified within the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund established by American Rescue Plan Act, Public Law 117-2 and demonstrated by peer reviewed and academic studies on the impacts of community health crises:
    a. Anticipated learning loss resulting from a public health emergency or other community disaster.
    b. Basic literacy and numeracy are critical skills needed to advance learning and if not attained in the early grades, will put students at lifelong disadvantage in pursuing success in career and life.
    c. Absence of available early childhood education opportunities in the community results in anticipated learning loss or lack of school readiness.
    d. Cost prohibitive nature of early childhood education opportunities in the community results in disparity of access that contributes to anticipated learning loss or lack of school readiness.
    e. Improved access to early childhood education opportunities in the community will encourage or expand parent entry into workforce and allow for further development of the community's economy.

The trustees shall annually review this policy based on changing circumstances pertaining to the criteria used for determination of the program. The administration is authorized to enroll students in a manner consistent with this policy and to develop procedures to implement this policy.

Legal Reference:	§ 20-4-101, MCA	Definitions
	§ 20-5-101, MCA	Admittance of child to school
	§ 20-6-501, MCA	Definition of various schools
	§ 20-7-117, MCA	Kindergarten and preschool programs
	§ 20-9-309, MCA	Basic system of free quality public elementary and secondary schools defined
	Article X, section 1, of the Montana constitution	
	Individual with Disabilities Act Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973	
	National School Lunch Act (Public Law 396, 79th congress, chapter 281)	
	Title III, ESEA (English language Acquisition, language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act)	
	McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 (Pub. L. 100-77, July 22, 1987, 101 Stat. 482, U.S.C. § 11301 et seq.	

Data/Study Reference: Engzell, P., Frey, A. & Verhagen, M. D. "Learning loss due to school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic" *Proc. Natl Acad. Sci. USA* 118, e2022376118 (2021).
Melinda Wenner Moyer, "The COVID generation: how is the pandemic affecting kids' brains?", *Nature*, 10.1038/d41586-022-00027-4, 601, 7892, (180-183), (2022).

Policy History:
Adopted on:
Reviewed on:
Revised on:

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