

Montana Advocates for Children Policy Agenda – 2015

Members: Montana Child Care Association (MCCA), Montana Association for the Education of Young Children (MtAEYC), Montana Head Start Association (MTHSA) and the Montana Child Care Resource and Referral Network (MtCCRRN).

1. Publically funded, universal Pre-K: We support the development of Pre-K but stress that it is critical that this program have a mixed delivery system to enable contracting with local Head Start or Child Care programs, increase parental choices, and strengthen community investment and responsibility.
2. State investment in Head Start: Many states invest in Head Start so that children just over 100% of FPL can be served in high quality programs. Many models exist and many “gap” children could be targeted for high quality, comprehensive services so as to ensure their readiness for school. We support the state of Montana investing in our most vulnerable young children by investing in expansion of Head Start and Early Head Start.
3. Child Care Subsidy at 150% of FPL: We support establishing eligibility for the Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship (BBCCS - low income child care subsidy program at a minimum of 150% of the federal poverty index.
4. Market Rate increase to 75th Percentile: The benefit to low income families to access child care must be adequate to pay the cost of child care. We support reimbursing child care programs at the 75th Percentile of Market Rate when they serve children enrolled in the Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship program.
5. Strengthening Child Care Licensing – We support the new Federal regulations which require annual inspections. MT must establish a risk-based protocol for inspecting child care facilities, responding to complaints and following up on licensing violations. MT must invest \$50,000 to obtain a valid new monitoring tool that will streamline monitoring visits while maintaining licensing integrity. This is necessary to meet the timeline requirement in the federal legislation that funds child care licensing in MT.
6. STARS Expansion – We support state funding to expand and maintain the developing STARS to Quality system that is working to establish, ensure and sustain quality care and education throughout all early childhood programs in Montana.
7. Medicaid expansion - We support Medicaid expansion for low income working adults and families so that quality and adequate health care is available to all.
8. Compulsory Education - We support compulsory education from age 5 to high school graduation. Children ages 5-7 are not adequately addressed by our current laws and thus do not always attend school or have program services until age 7 when remediation is provided and prevention would have been more beneficial.