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**Early Childhood Education Standards Approved to Ensure Quality and Accountability
for Schools Receiving Public Funds**

HELENA – Today, the Montana Board of Public Education approved early childhood education accreditation and teacher licensure standards. These standards are a crucial part of Governor Steve Bullock's Early Edge initiative to expand access to publicly funded, high-quality early childhood education.

"Montanans expect that when their public dollars are used that there will be accountability and standards. These standards will ensure that the programs that are a part of Early Edge will be high-quality and whether they are in a public school setting or in partnership with one of the state's existing quality providers, that they will set students on a path toward success throughout their educational career," Bullock said of the standards. "The approval of these standards is an important step toward giving Montana's earliest learners the strong educational foundation they deserve – and our state needs."

The standards approved today:

- Set a class size limit of 18 students;
- Set a minimum number of hours required for a preschool program;
- Describe what children should know and be able to do in order to be prepared for Kindergarten;
- Create the early childhood educator license; and
- Establish early childhood educator preparatory standards.

"It is important that our earliest learners have access to a high-quality education that prepares them to be successful in Kindergarten," said Superintendent Juneau. "When students step into their Kindergarten class prepared and ready to learn, there is no end to what they will accomplish in their elementary and high school careers. Montana's public education system is ready to take this step."

Last month, Bullock announced that he would include in his budget proposal for the 2015 Legislature funding for grants to local school boards to establish or expand high-quality early childhood education programs in their community. Through this funding, local school boards will have the flexibility to either create an early childhood education program within their public school system or

partner with existing high-quality providers. Participation in public preschool programs would be voluntary for school districts as well as families. More information about Bullock's proposal can be found at EarlyEdgeMT.com.

Montana is one of eight states without a publicly funded pre-kindergarten option for four year-olds.

Studies have shown the benefits that high-quality early childhood education has on student success. Children who take part in high-quality early childhood education programs are:

- More likely to read at grade level;
- Less likely to repeat a grade or require special education;
- More likely to earn a high school diploma; and
- Less likely to become teenage parents, require public assistance, abuse drugs, or end up in jail.

In addition, these programs have been shown to help ensure that every child enters kindergarten ready to learn with appropriate social and behavioral habits that will allow teachers to focus on teaching rather than managing distractions.

High-quality early childhood education programs have shown a significant economic impact as well. On average, for every dollar spent on these programs, communities see a \$7-\$9 return on investment through savings and increased economic activity.

The Montana Board of Public Education is an independent board established by the Montana Constitution to adopt and implement accreditation and teacher certification standards for public schools in the state.

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