

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

BRIAN SCHWEITZER
GOVERNOR



JOHN BOHLINGER
LT. GOVERNOR

My fellow Montanans:

Education matters. It matters for the youngest Montanans getting ready for school and it matters for young adults hoping to attend and afford college. It matters regardless of where you live in Big Sky Country and it matters to the folks who drive the economy of the state.

Montana must offer its citizens the ability to respond to a rapidly changing world. The best paying jobs today and in the future require ever-increasing skills and knowledge and the ability to learn, grow and adapt as jobs change. My "Education for Life" platform is based on the following principles:

- Education is the great equalizer
- Investment in early childhood makes good economic sense
- It is essential that children are ready for school and those schools are ready for children
- Full time kindergarten is important. It helps all children become successful students, especially at-risk children. Kindergarten opens the door for all children to get ready for college and know they can succeed
- Quality public K-12 schools across Montana
- College access and affordability is critical to ensuring that all Montana children who want to go to college can achieve that dream
- We have to support our education system to meet the needs of all children, their parents and grandparents

Montana is ready to secure the best beginnings for our young children. This document summarizes two school readiness summits held in the summer and fall of 2006. The first summit convened 14 community teams and one state government team to create comprehensive plans to ensure the school readiness of Montana children.

The second summit targeted Montana businesses and preparation of a ready workforce. We greatly appreciate the interest and financial support provided by the Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation, the National Governor's Association, the Head Start/State Collaboration Office and Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems grant of DPHHS to make these summits possible.

Through the collaboration and creative strategies that emerged from these two summits, we are well on our way to strengthening Montana families and providing the best for the youngest citizens of our state. I welcome your comments and suggestions on how we can make sure that our youngest citizens have the best beginnings in their education.

Sincerely,

BRIAN SCHWEITZER
Governor

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Executive Summary

2006 Governor's Summits on School Readiness in Montana



DENNIS & PHYLLIS
WASHINGTON
FOUNDATION

ABOUT THE DENNIS AND PHYLLIS WASHINGTON FOUNDATION

Charitable activities of the Washington Companies are managed through the Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation. The Foundation has contributed millions of dollars to charities, focusing primarily on youth and areas of health care and education. Besides a national presence the Foundation has a special interest in Montana and those communities in which the Washington Companies do business. www.dpwfoundation.org



ABOUT THE NGA CENTER FOR BEST PRACTICES

The NGA Center for Best Practices' mission is to develop and implement innovative solutions to public policy challenges. The NGA Task Force on School Readiness uses elements of the Readiness Equation as a framework for recommendations and policy options for what governors can do to improve school readiness. Emphasis on role of families, communities, schools, and the supporting role of state policy and service infrastructure for each. www.nga.org



DENNIS & PHYLLIS
WASHINGTON
FOUNDATION



“Montana’s children are tomorrow’s workforce. There is a connection between quality education and economic success. It has been demonstrated in economies and by education specialists across the world that the best results come from the best beginnings.”

—Governor Brian Schweitzer



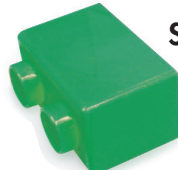
“During the first few years of life a child undergoes tremendous growth and change. If this period of life includes support for growth in cognition, language, motor skills, adaptive skills and social/emotional functioning, the child is more likely to succeed in school and later contribute to society.”

—Art Rolnick

“Comprehensive assessments of school readiness must consider not only the characteristics and abilities of children, but also the conditions supporting children’s development. Such assessments should consider community conditions, including the quality and accessibility of health services, neighborhood safety and opportunities, parenting education, child care and early education services and the “readiness” of the schools.”

—Free to Grow, Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University

GOVERNOR SCHWEITZER LAUNCHED A SCHOOL READINESS AGENDA IN 2006, by hosting two summits focusing on the importance of early childhood. The Schweitzer Administration believes all children are born ready to learn and that it takes communities, parents, educators, and business leaders to ensure that children get the best beginnings possible to ensure their success in tomorrow’s world. This report provides a summary of summit recommendations.



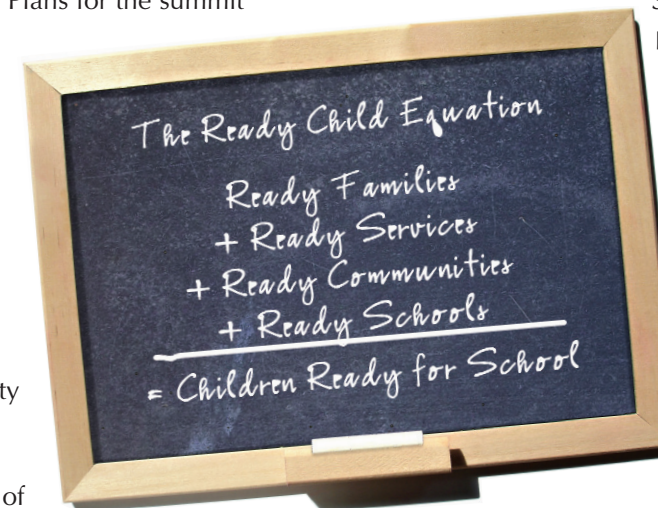
SUMMIT #1: Community Teams Focus on School Readiness

In June 2006, fourteen (14) community teams and one state-level team convened in Helena to identify ways to coordinate early childhood services that could lead to better policies for young children. Plans for the summit began in 2005 with a dedicated Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) grant coordination team for Maternal and Child Health and Early Childhood Services Bureaus of Department of Public Health and Human Services. The target areas of the ECCS project are: health insurance and medical home for each child, mental health and social/emotional development, quality early care and education, parent education and family support, all of which are part of the overall picture of school readiness. With the leadership of Governor Schweitzer, Montana successfully received a National Governor’s Association Grant to complement the ECCS strategy and host two summits focusing on school readiness.

To prepare for the summit, the planners held forums across Montana to help community teams begin to identify what

works best locally to address the needs of their young children and families. Some topics of discussion were: identifying stakeholders; effective practices and policies at both the community and state levels; necessary improvements to the delivery system, etc. Teams were also introduced to The Ready Child Equation (see blackboard) created by the National School Readiness Indicators Project (www.rikidscount.org) so they could focus on how the formula applied to their own community.

The summit approach took the participants from a global view of school readiness to the designing of local action plans, commonly referred to as a Future Search model. The evening opened with inspiring presentations from Governor Brian Schweitzer and Anne Mitchell, the president of the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Both speakers focused on the importance of the early years and the implications for our global economy. Education is a lifetime issue—not just a K-12 issue. The audience was challenged to be proactive in shaping its future by appropriately supporting the education of scientists, mathematicians, problem solvers, leaders and strong, healthy families.



Over the course of two days the participants worked in community teams, using The Ready Child Equation to shape their own action plans. Libby Hancock from Montana State University and John Sommers-Flanagan from the University of Montana facilitated discussions and made presentations. Dr. Neal Horen, Georgetown University, educated participants about the importance of infant/toddler mental health. In order to learn, children need to play-process and practice what they are learning. And the same holds true for adults. Amidst the

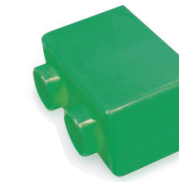
real work of building effective action plans, the teams were challenged with some “play time.” Turning community plans into “skits”, each team entertained their colleagues. Consistent themes emerged: the need for increased public awareness about the importance of child development and demand for professional development and training for parents, staff, and community leadership.



SUMMIT #2: Business Leaders Summit on School Readiness

A by-product of the community-based summit was a partnership with the Governor, the Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation and the National Governor’s Association (NGA) to further the conversation on early childhood and workforce. A Business Leaders Summit on School Readiness was held in October 2006. Nearly 75 business leaders were joined by state leaders and representatives from the community teams to learn about the strong connection between quality education and economic success.

Featured speakers were Art Rolnick, Senior Vice President and Director of Research from the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank, Governor Brian Schweitzer and Anna Lovejoy, Senior Policy Analyst from the NGA Center for Best Practices. Each presentation covered the importance of the early years and the body of research that underscores the economic and social benefits to investing in young children. The benefit to school readiness, such as full-time kindergarten, was underscored as a means to address the challenges Montana faces in preparing children for a global economy and complex 21st century society. Over lunch, participants listened to four (4) panelists from Montana’s business community discuss strategies that support families and young children. Early childhood community and state leaders facilitated table discussions on how business can invest in young children to help Montana be workforce ready. The Business Summit concluded with people feeling inspired and ready to commit to school readiness for all Montana children.



NEXT STEPS: These summits helped community, government and business leaders come together for a shared purpose to advance a state-wide school readiness agenda and to raise awareness of the importance of the first few years of life. It was agreed that full-time kindergarten is a key place for Montana to start. It was also agreed that each community plan will impact the way in which children successfully transition to kindergarten.

Moving forward, Montana will continue to use The Ready Child Equation and provide an opportunity for consistent community involvement. Each community team was awarded a \$3,000 mini-grant to pursue their action plans, with an eye toward early childhood public awareness and training. The Early Childhood Services Bureau is creating a statewide information campaign about early childhood and school readiness. A full report summarizing the work completed by community teams will be published in summer 2007.

To help Montana continue its school readiness work, the Governor was awarded another grant from the NGA. This leadership grant created an ad-hoc School Readiness Task Force, comprised of state government leadership to focus on governance, data and state-wide planning. The Task Force will complete its work in 2008. With technical assistance from NGA’s Center for Best Practice, Task Force members are incorporating school readiness into their job scope to reinforce the multi-faceted influences in the lives of young children and families. The Early Childhood Services Bureau and the Head Start Collaboration Office are leading the effort. The Governor’s Office continues to unify its initiatives that affect young children in education and health under the title “Best Beginnings”. The Schweitzer Administration’s proposed budget for 2008/2009 focuses on the importance of full-time kindergarten as a key piece to building a strong academic future for all Montana’s children and building a strong workforce for tomorrow. Montana is well on its way to becoming a READY STATE so that all children are ready for school and life.

BEST BEGINNINGS FOR A READY WORKFORCE

Things businesses can do to support healthy child development

- Sponsor parent education classes
- Provide more information regarding child care and other family services
- Offer flex time benefits for employees
- Provide on site child care
- Support early care and education legislation
- Provide flexible options for parents with sick children
- Build consortiums of businesses to work together on early childhood issues
- Support the expansion of preschools, Head Start and Early Head Start and other quality services for children
- Encourage and support employee volunteering in programs that serve young children
- Provide part time employees with a regular work schedule
- Allow employees to bring their babies to work
- Accommodate breast feeding mothers
- Permit employees to work at home when possible/necessary
- Become involved with existing programs
- Create job sharing opportunities
- Promote philanthropic investment in early childhood programs and services
- Supply space to the community for meetings
- Set up pre-tax spending accounts for employees that can be used for child care
- Donate goods and services
- Ask your employees and co-workers how you can support them and their families

WHAT IS SCHOOL READINESS?



- Ability to take directions
- Language development
- Good physical health
- Phonemic awareness
- Ability to work with others

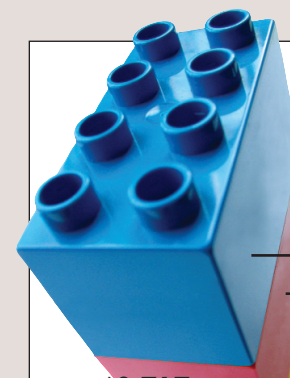
Courtesy of State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network, Charles Bruner, Director

EARLY BRAIN DEVELOPMENT



- Children need to explore and interact with people and their environment to build a solid brain structure

NEARLY ONE IN FOUR MONTANA CHILDREN LIVE AT OR BELOW THE FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL



- 200 % or above FPL (45%)
- 100-200% of FPL (31%)
- At or below FPL (24%)

- 63,717 young children under age 6 in Montana
 - Median Family Income (with child): \$40,000*
 - 100% FPL is \$20,000 for family of four in 2006
- *U.S. Current Population Survey, combined average of 2004, 2005, 2006

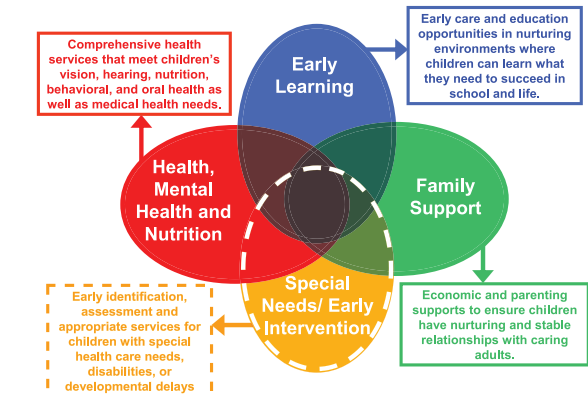
EVIDENCE FOR FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN

- Positive effects on long-term student achievement
- Reductions in the number of children who are held back
- Positive development of student social and behavioral skills
- Significantly stronger academic gains
- Significantly helps to close academic achievement gaps for low-income and minority children
- No negative outcomes commonly associated with full day kindergarten



“Full Day Kindergarten Programs Improve Changes of Academic Success,” —Dale DeCesare

STATE EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM



RURAL CHILDREN LAG FAR BEHIND THEIR NON-RURAL PEERS IN KEY LITERACY SKILL

Specifically, they are...

- Far less likely to recognize letters
- Far less familiar with the beginning sounds of words and reading
- Far more likely to land in special education classes in kindergarten than children growing up in cities or suburbs



Source: National Center for Rural Early Childhood Learning Initiatives, and reported in Preschool Matters