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Governor Steve Bullock Announces Components of Early Childhood Education Proposal
“Our most important obligation is to the next generation of Montanans”

HARDIN/BILLINGS – Today, at events in Hardin and Billings, Governor Steve Bullock unveiled the details of the early childhood education proposal that he’ll bring forward to the 2015 legislature. The proposal, dubbed Early Edge Montana, aims to make high-quality, half-day, voluntary pre-kindergarten programs available to all Montana four year-olds.

“Our most important obligation is to the next generation of Montanans, to ensure they have more opportunities to succeed than we did,” Bullock said. “It’s time that Montana give every four year-old access to high-quality, early childhood education that will set them on a path to thrive through their educational career and beyond.”

Through his proposal, block grants will be available to every Montana public school district to create or expand high-quality early childhood education programs in their community. School districts will have the option of creating a new program, or partnering with an existing early childhood education program to build on the existing strengths in their community. Programs will be required to meet high quality standards set by the Board of Public Education. Participation in these programs will be voluntary.

The Board of Public Education is currently drafting quality standards that:

- Requires a lead teacher with an early grades endorsement;
- Sets a teacher to student ratio of 1:10;
- Establishes guidelines for family engagement that ensure family, community and culture are integrated as part of a child’s learning both inside and outside the classroom; and
- Sets a process for collaboration with community resources to connect children and families with tools to support health growth and development of children.
- Requires developmentally appropriate curriculum including social and emotional development through play, learning soft skills

Bullock will request a \$37 million biennial appropriation in his budget proposal that will be presented to the legislature in November.

“The budget is a reflection of our values as a state. It paints a picture of what we view as priorities,” Bullock said. “By ensuring high-quality, early childhood education is available to every Montana four year-old, we’ll demonstrate our commitment to the success and well-being of our youngest learners, and lays the foundation for economic prosperity for years to come.”

Montana is currently 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,
- 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.

Bullock and Lt. Gov. Angela McLean will be traveling to communities throughout the state this week to visit high-quality pre-kindergarten programs, and discuss the impacts that the Early Edge Montana proposal will have on education in our state.

More information about Bullock’s proposal and the benefits of high-quality early childhood education can be found at EarlyEdgeMT.com.

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