

# Preschool Matters

## *Talking Points For The Montana Preschool Development Grant*

### **KEY MESSAGES**

- For the first time, some Montana public schools are now able to offer free, high-quality preschool for moderate- and low-income families.
- All Montana children should have access to free, high-quality preschool.
- Access to preschool is critical for ensuring your child is ready to learn in kindergarten.
- Children who attend a high-quality preschool program are more likely to succeed in reading and math, graduate from high school, and even earn more money as adults.

### **WHO IS ELIGIBLE?**

- If your family is at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty line, or are eligible for special education, your 4-year-old could qualify for attending preschool.
- For a family of four, 200 percent of the federal poverty level is an annual income of \$48,500.

### **WHY IS PRESCHOOL IMPORTANT?**

- Ninety percent of brain development happens before a child is 5-years-old.
- Children who attend preschool learn important skills like how to follow directions, how to get along with others, and how to pay attention. This will set your child up for success by the time he/she is ready for kindergarten.
- Children who don't attend preschool are 25 percent more likely to drop out of high school.
- The average cost of childcare for a Montana 4-year-old is more than \$7,500, which can be a large chunk of your income.

### **BACKGROUND**

- Montana is one of 18 states to receive federal Preschool Development Grant funding, which equals \$10 million per year for the next four years (\$40 million total).
- Free, high-quality preschool will be offered in 16 Montana communities, including eight Indian Reservations.
  - 2015: Great Falls, Hardin, Lewistown, Helena, Bozeman, Libby, Anaconda
  - 2016: Browning, Crow, Fort Peck
  - 2017: Kalispell, Butte, Lame Deer, Rocky Boy, Ronan/Pablo, Fort Belknap
- Three state entities are working together to develop free, high-quality preschool: the Office of Public Instruction, the Department of Public Health and Human Services, the Governor's Office.

