

# Getting and Keeping Business Involved: Tips for Montana Early Childhood Leaders

## About this Guide

The guide is intended to help early childhood leaders work effectively with business partners, policy makers and other leaders. It offers tips drawn from research and experience on how to create and sustain successful partnerships with the business community. It is designed for current and future early childhood leaders who want to create sustainable relationships with business and policy makers as well as those who want to expand existing partnerships. This document provides real tips and examples of how to build, communicate, and understand the importance of business collaborations to sustain early childhood efforts.

## 10 Tips for Getting and Keeping Business Involved

- Tip 1:** Make the Right (Business) Case
- Tip 2:** Have Clear Vision, Goals, and Strategies
- Tip 3:** Know What to Ask For
- Tip 4:** Understand Business Culture and Avoid Jargon
- Tip 5:** Find the Right Champions
- Tip 6:** Get Business Peers to Help Recruit Others
- Tip 7:** Measure and Report on Results
- Tip 8:** Keep in Touch and Keep It Brief
- Tip 9:** Encourage Business to Build Partnerships
- Tip 10:** Publicly Recognize Business Contributions



# Every Montana child needs to start life with the *Best Beginning* possible

As a person who works in early childhood, you know the importance of providing children with a sturdy foundation to be able to grow and prosper throughout life. You also know that in order for that to happen, families, businesses, and communities need to work together. Unfortunately, the business leaders you wish to form partnerships with may not understand all the

necessary pieces needed for children to grow and thrive in their communities. Listed below is some language that has been compiled by early childhood experts throughout the state explaining the important elements. Consider utilizing this information as you work with business leaders and others to better understand the needs of our community's children.



## It all adds up.

Scientists and economic development experts agree investments in quality early care and education are essential for our children, our community, and our future.

### Supportive Families:

- Provide economic stability.
- Connect to the community where they live, work, learn, and play.
- Utilize supports to raise healthy and competent children in a safe and secure environment.

### Engaged Communities:

- Strengthen the foundation of the family through healthy neighborhoods.
- Provide access to affordable and adequate housing.
- Partner with businesses to provide time and commitment, financial and institutional resources, and skills and knowledge to insure community prosperity.

### High quality early care and education programs:

- Recognize and respect parents as their child's first teacher and commit to building strong parent/teacher partnerships.
- Provide developmentally appropriate academics and social and emotional guidance.
- Understand and respect how ethnicity, language and culture provide the rich context in which children learn.

### Children Ready for Life and Learning

- Thrive from "rich" early experiences which provide the foundation for the construction of sturdy brain architecture.
- Benefit from intellectually stimulating learning environments that allow for play and active exploration so that children can develop a broad range of skills and learning capacities.
- Need safe, healthy, and supportive environments that provide physical and emotional security.
- Need stable and responsive relationships with nurturing adults to enhance children's learning and social and emotional development.
- Benefit from adults in their lives who form reciprocal relationships to provide for their needs
- Need good nutrition, eating habits, and physical activity (including the mother before and during pregnancy).

An investment in **Best Beginnings** has the power to transform lifelong outcomes for all children.

## Tip 1: Making the Right (Business) Case

First and foremost, businesses need to understand the importance of providing high quality early care and education and family friendly workplaces is essential to recruitment and retention, which is essential to business.

Many businesses want to do the right thing, but their main goal is to make a profit. Early childhood leaders too often believe their own good work is

enough to make a compelling case, which can lead to disappointment and missed opportunities. See early childhood objectives through the eyes of the business person, understanding that unless the company benefits, there is no compelling reason for them to be involved. The challenge is to communicate in ways that address those business needs. The good news is that there are so many sound business reasons for employers to address early childhood issues.

### Understand and Be Supportive

It's hard to find and keep the best employees.



Business

Offering family-supportive benefits, such as flexible scheduling or child care benefits can help keep recruitment and training costs down.



Early Childhood Leader

Absenteeism affects productivity and can reduce profits.



Business

Back-up child care options can help reduce absenteeism. Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR & R) programs can work with businesses to design community solutions for substitute care. Let me get you the contact information for your local CCR&R program and they can work with you on some solutions.



Early Childhood Leader

Health insurance and child care are expensive. I'm a small business and can't afford to provide coverage for families or underwrite child care costs.



Business

Getting eligible children enrolled in the state's Healthy Montana Kids insurance program and the Best Beginnings Child Care scholarship program may help. I will send you some more resources.



Early Childhood Leader

I can't find employees with necessary basic skills.



Business

Future prosperity and continued economic development requires students who have effective learning environments from diapers through high school. This success requires positive early childhood development that comes from quality child care, health care and parenting supports.



Early Childhood Leader

## Tip 2: Have Clear Vision, Goals and Strategies

A business's success depends on their ability to reach identified goals with profitable results. Framing your request in language businesses use and understand will increase attention to and support for your efforts. If you can't explain the purpose of your efforts, the way you intend to accomplish your goals and the indicators of success, it will be very difficult to convince others to join you.

Even more importantly, without a clear vision, goals and strategies, you will find it more difficult to end up where you want to be. Regularly reviewing your goals and strategies enables you to assess what's working and what needs re-tooling. When you present your goals and plans in ways that help employers see how their involvement can help them accomplish business goals, you'll be more likely to succeed.

### This...

We really need business leaders to support early childhood.



Early Childhood Leader

Sorry, I'm already over-committed. Maybe next year.

THINKS: I have no idea what this is about and I'm too busy to find out.



Business

### Could be this...

Our local School Readiness Team of parents, schools and community programs is working in our community to help make sure children are ready to succeed in school.



Early Childhood Leader

That sounds like an interesting project. Can you send me more information?

THINKS: Would this help our employees?



Business

### Making it Happen

Consider reaching outside your normal professional network. Make efforts to attend local Chamber of Commerce events, business luncheons, or breakfast service clubs. These efforts will provide you opportunities to meet new business professionals, learn from others, and share your organization's efforts.

We hope to help 2,000 parents in our community in the next 3 years with workplace parenting classes and family events, such as our Baby Fair. Can you think of ways to help?



Early Childhood Leader

We could do brown bag lunches at work and put your information in pay envelopes.

THINKS: Public events are a great way to get free advertising and fit our corporate goals. This could make us look good.



Business



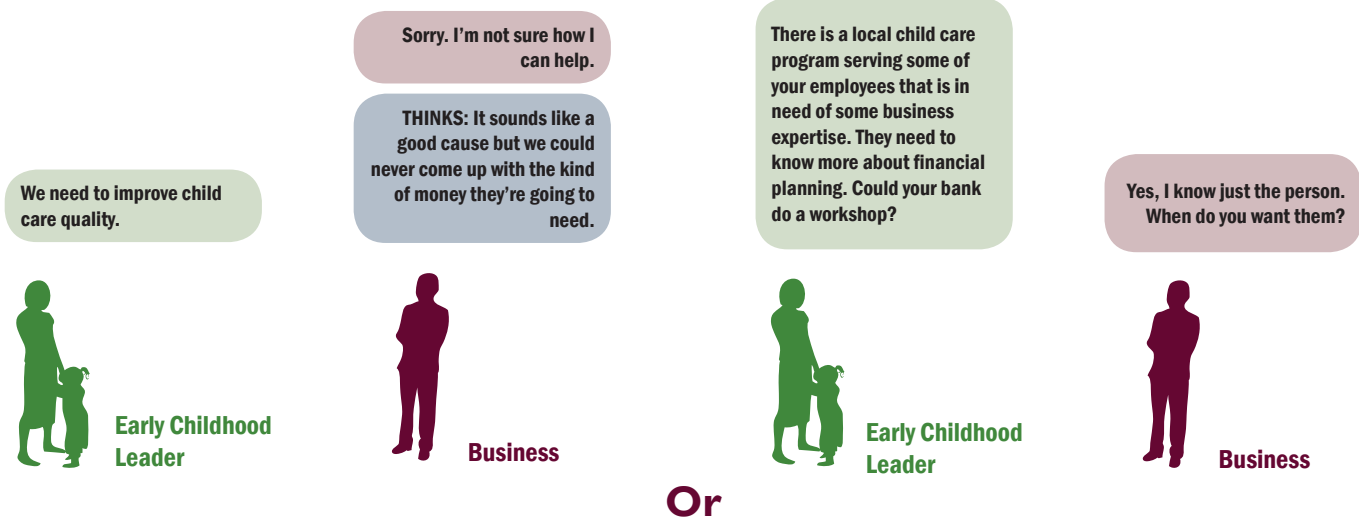
## Tip 3: Know What to Ask For

To successfully get businesses to help with early childhood concerns, it is critical to understand not only why early childhood matters to business, but how businesses can best contribute to meet your goals and objectives. Asking for the wrong thing can lead to missed opportunities. Businesses can contribute by providing financial support, developing workplace initiatives, making in-kind contributions, engaging volunteers, providing technical expertise, serving as early childhood champions and influencing public policy.

There are also many forms of in-kind support businesses can provide. Experts, like accountants, financial managers, communications experts, managers, risk managers and others are often willing to work on projects that allow them to use their skills in new ways. These kinds of “special assignments” can also be learning experiences for junior executives. Often involvement starts small and deepens over time. Early childhood leaders should be clear about what type of involvement might be appropriate for each business targeted.

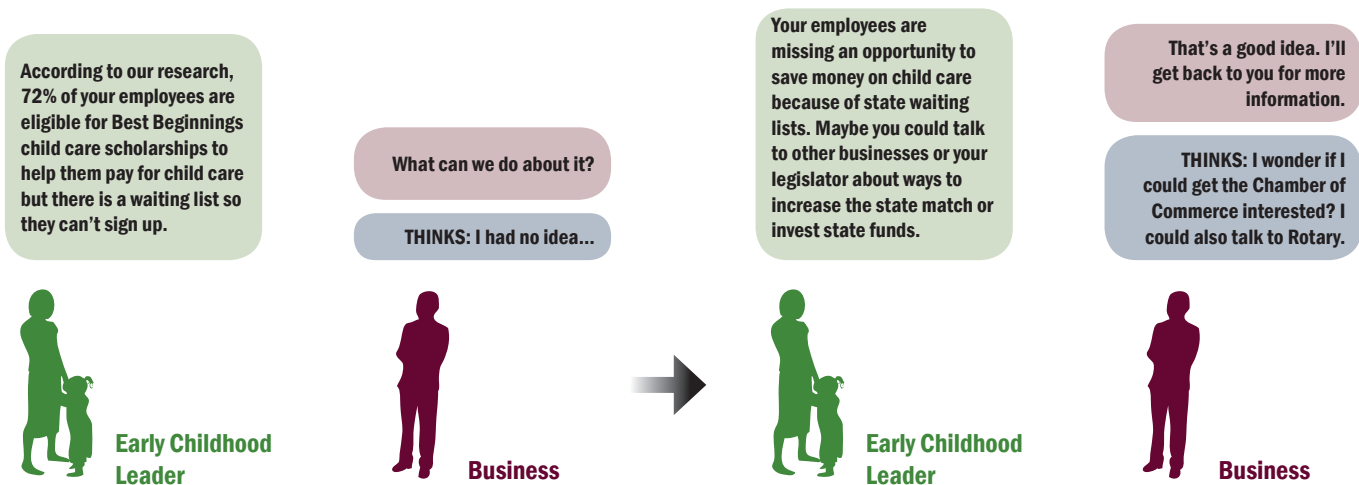
### This...

### Could be this...



### This...

### Could be this...



## Tip 4: Understand Business Culture and Avoid Jargon

Take the time to learn about business as you would another culture, by trying to understand their language and customs in order to work more effectively together. Framing partnership efforts to emphasize what businesses can get out of their involvement can help you get the best thinking and commitment from your business partners.





Nothing is more off-putting to businesses than meetings full of early childhood process and jargon. Businesses tend to make decisions quickly and business partners will likely not understand early childhood

acronyms. Be clear and ready to act when you invite business to the table.

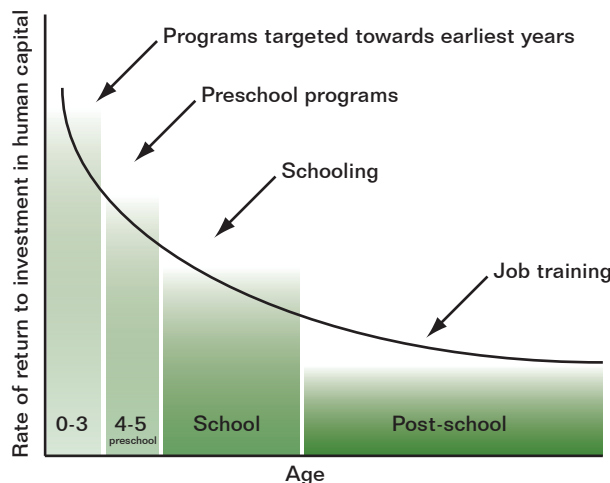
It is equally important to understand that businesses can be cautious about new commitments. This reluctance may be daunting to those unfamiliar with the business climate. It pays to do your homework, talking to key leaders who can help you understand a company's history and style of involvement. Building trust takes time. Once a compelling argument is made and a connection to a business is developed, businesses move fast and they will expect you to keep up with them.

### This...

### Could be this...

<p style="background-color: #e0f2f1; padding: 5px; border-radius: 10px;">We need your help to raise our state Medicaid cap and CCDF match from DPHHS. We also need more business people on our task force.</p>	<p style="background-color: #e0e0e0; padding: 5px; border-radius: 10px;">Hmm... Maybe next year.</p> <p style="background-color: #e0e0e0; padding: 5px; border-radius: 10px;">THINKS: They've got to be kidding. Who would sit through those long meetings where you never know what they might be talking about? Dream on...</p>	<p style="background-color: #e0f2f1; padding: 5px; border-radius: 10px;">If Montana could raise more matching funds, we could generate more federal dollars and more of your employee's kids' might be able to get help with health care and child care costs. Do you think the Chamber might put it on their legislative agenda?</p>	<p style="background-color: #e0e0e0; padding: 5px; border-radius: 10px;">Makes sense. Let me bring it up with a friend of mine at the Chamber tomorrow.</p> <p style="background-color: #e0e0e0; padding: 5px; border-radius: 10px;">THINKS: This could help our employees and our company image.</p>
 <p><b>Early Childhood Leader</b></p>	 <p><b>Business</b></p>	 <p><b>Early Childhood Leader</b></p>	 <p><b>Business</b></p>

### Rates of Return to Human Capital Investment at Different Ages: Return to an Extra Dollar at Various Ages



www.heckmanequation.org  
Source: U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

## Tip 5: Find the Right Champions

It is critical to identify and get support from champions who have a passion or reason to care about early childhood issues and who are able to impact decision-making in their business. Look for personal reasons they might be interested. New parents and grandparents are often especially concerned about early childhood issues as are human resource managers who focus on keeping a company's workforce stable and productive.

Although it is important to have support of the top managers, it is equally effective to work with the people who get things done.

Montana Kids Count and the Bureau of Business and Economic Research (BBER) hosted Business Summits in several Montana communities in 2009 to hear directly from the business community how they perceive themselves as part of building the early care and education system and ways they are willing to interface with the local community. Contact Montana Kids Count to learn how you can connect with these champions today ([www.montanakidscount.org](http://www.montanakidscount.org)).

### This...

### Could be this...

Since you're listed as Donations Coordinator, we'd like you to serve our local early learning council.



Early Childhood Leader

My boss won't allow it.

THINKS: Why are they asking me? I only process requests. I don't make any decisions



Business

I hear you have been spending lots of time with you grandkids lately. We're launching a community survey to find out about early childhood concerns in our community. Can you help us develop the survey to make sure we are using the right language and by asking some of the other businesses if they would commit to completing the survey when we send it out?



Early Childhood Leader

Sure. What's involved? Who should I contact?

THINKS: Finally, a good community project is just what I need.



Business

### Making it Happen

Consider highlighting a business partner in your organization's newsletter. It not only provides positive recognition for the business, it strengthens your relationship and shows the business you value their contribution to your organization.

## Tip 6: Get Business Peers to Help Recruit Others

Business leaders like working with their colleagues, with people they know and whom they enjoy working. Business peers speak the same language and can invite others to join in ways they will understand. You'll have

more success if you ask business people to help recruit others and get them to help figure out which arguments might work best with their colleagues.

### This...

### Could be this...

We've never met but I was hoping you would join our Child Care Task Force.

Sorry. I'm really busy these days.

THINKS: I don't know this person and don't have time for another committee.

I've been working on the local early learning council to make sure all young children in our community get off to a good beginning. We know fathers are important and we sponsor monthly Dynamite Dads events, involving more than 350 dads last year. We need a new council member to help us plan future events. Would you be willing to join?

That's impressive. I guess I could. What's involved?

THINKS: Finally, someone who understands how hard it is to be a good father and wants me to help.



Early Childhood Leader



Business

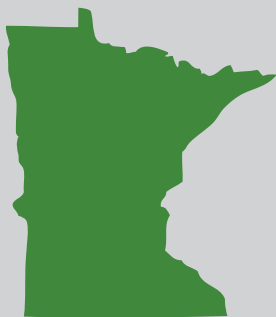


Early Childhood Leader



Business

### Best Practices: Minnesota Example



Minnesota's business community has taken an active lead in the state's investments in early learning. In 2003, business leaders launched Minnesota Business for Early Learning (MnBEL) to raise awareness about early childhood education, to identify and promote best practices in the workplace, and to impact public policy. Today, MnBEL is a 200-member organization composed of high-level business executives from more than 100 companies and organizations across the state. MnBEL also works collaboratively with other business organizations, including the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce and a number of local chambers throughout the greater Minnesota area.



## Tip 7: Measure and Report on Results

Many businesses use data to inform their decision-making process and to assess the impact of their investments. Giving business partners data that substantiates the need for community action provides a rationale for their participation and investment. Complementing this with information about the results of their efforts helps you continue to build credibility and strengthen the case for ongoing involvement. It also helps your partnership evaluate and refine strategies as you achieve your goals.

In 2008 Montana reviewed the early care and education industry and published a report. Investments in *Early Childhood: An Essential Industry that is Both Good for Business and Vital to Montana's Economy*. Key findings from this report:

The early care and education industry in Montana provides care and education for young children birth through age 8 through a variety of settings such as early childhood centers and family child care homes, Head Start, and other private programs. Early care and education:

- Generates \$143 million annually and provides more than 6,600 full time jobs
- Benefits all industries in the state by allowing parents to work, attend school or training and participate in the workforce
- Builds a ready workforce and laying the foundation for future economic success
- Increases school readiness and improves K-12 outcomes
- Provides safe learning environments for some 68,400 children whose parents work

### This...

Now that we have been meeting for a year I'm happy to report what things are improving. We need to improve even more.



Early Childhood Leader

It's been a year already? I don't even know what we have accomplished.

THINKS: Well, this was a waste of time. I wonder what improving means?



Business

### Could be this...

Because of your investment of time and dollars in X, Y and Z, 50 percent more children have been in high quality early childhood program this last year. I'd like to thank the Data Company for help up with the software to help track our progress.



Early Childhood Leader

We did that well?! I wonder what else we can do.

Wow! we actually accomplished something. My CEO will be pleased. With results like this, it's worth my time.



Business

## Tip 8: Keep in Touch and Keep it Brief

Working with business partners requires you to figure out the best way to keep them up to date about the impact of their efforts, identify new opportunities, and encourage on-going participation. Communication strategies might include regular meetings, newsletters, email and/or conference calls. It is important not to bury them in too much information. A bulleted summary or brief is always preferable to pounds of paper. Whatever the message, keeping everyone

informed in ways that are brief, concise, and clear and to the point helps keep partnership efforts moving while respecting the time constraints of all partners.

It helps to learn about business partner's preferred styles of communication from their staff. Ask a business leader's staff or assistant about preferences and what to avoid. It is the assistant's job to condense information and make it actionable. Your business partner and their staff will appreciate when you ask for their help.

### This...

### Could be this...

Here are three books and four reports to read before our meeting next week.

My, my...I'll get to it if I can.

**THINKS:** They think I have time to read all this? I'll be lucky to make the meeting. I'm not sure I can keep doing this

Here's a one-page summary and budget analysis on our early childhood initiative. We will be deciding on the budget for the new year at our next meeting.

This helps me prepare. What will it take to raise the money we need?

**THINKS:** This is great. It easier to make good decisions when we get good information. This group works and they don't drown me with paper!



Early Childhood Leader



Business



Early Childhood Leader



Business

### Making it Happen

Let business leaders see what you do. Consider giving them a tour of your facility and provide plenty of concise background information so they understand your work and organization's mission.

## Tip 9: Encourage Businesses to Work with Other Businesses

Montana is a small business state. Business leaders can work more proactively if they work with other businesses in the community. Effectively leaders can often help other business support their community

investments by working together. Encouraging them to link and coordinate programs can broaden their awareness of ways they can help achieve multiple business goals and strengthen the community.

### This...

Could you donate funds to help us prepare a community coupon book to give expectant moms when they show up for prenatal care appointments?



Early Childhood Leader

Sorry, we're out of funds.

THINKS: I've spent all my money in the budget but this sounds like a good cause.



Business

### Could be this...

Could you help us get resources to expectant moms through coupon books distributed when they show up for prenatal care appointments?



Early Childhood Leader

Maybe. What do you need?



Business

### Or this...

I might be able to get our Community Affairs department involved.

We need printing, media, volunteers to distribute materials and help in getting other businesses to donate items for the coupons.



Early Childhood Leader

THINKS: I this I can sell this to the boss. He has a new granddaughter. Community Affairs is always looking for employee volunteer opportunities.



Business

### Making it Happen

Ask business partners to offer you a business referral for other community services. Whether it is assistance with accounting, web services, or printing a referral may help to boost the relationship along.

## Tip 10: Publicly Recognizing Business Contributions

Most businesses see positive public image as essential to their financial success. Being recognized with awards and media coverage can often lead to greater level of involvement. Tying business recognition events with activities that coincide with publication of public visibility for their efforts can be important.

It is important to publicly thank businesses that help

you with your efforts to support children and families in your communities. Be sure and include their names and logos in your publications, invite them to achievement ceremonies, and publicly praise their support in your press releases. Businesses will appreciate the free publicity future outcomes.

### This...

### Could be this...

We hope you will serve another term on the Early Learning Council.

Sorry, I won't be able to.

THINKS: We didn't get any press or any visibility for our efforts. I could do other things that would get more attention for our company

Here's the summary of the news coverage for our local Turn Off The TV Week. More than 500 families turned out for a variety of local events. We hope to be even more successful next year. We recognized your support in all our materials. Thanks to your help we were so successful this year and hope to reach even more families next year.

You did a great job. Even our employees are making positive comments. I hope we can help next year.

THINKS: We get our money's worth from this one. Ever since these guys gave us the award we've had twice as many customers with kids who heard about our efforts.



**DENNIS & PHYLLIS  
WASHINGTON  
FOUNDATION**

*The Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation has made a long term commitment to early childhood in Montana and has sponsored Business Summits to engage other business leaders in working on the issue.*

## Early Care Resources

Montana Childcare Resource and Referral Network ([www.montanachildcare.com](http://www.montanachildcare.com)).

Montana Early Childhood Services Bureau ([www.dphhs.gov/hcsd/childcare](http://www.dphhs.gov/hcsd/childcare)).

Montana Early Childhood Project ([www.mtecp.org](http://www.mtecp.org)).

Montana Head Start Association ([www.headstartmt.org](http://www.headstartmt.org)).

Frameworks Message Brief: Talking to Business Leaders About Early Child Development ([www.frameworksinstitute.org/ecd.html](http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/ecd.html))

From Child Care to Care Supports: Current Successes, Future Challenges. Mildred Warner, Ph.D. Linking Economic Development and Child Care Project, Cornell University (<http://economicdevelopmentandchildcare.org>)

NAEYC Public Policy and Communications Resources on the NAEYC Website: ([www.naeyc.org/childrens\\_champions/default.asp](http://www.naeyc.org/childrens_champions/default.asp))

National Women's Law Center ([www.nwlc.org](http://www.nwlc.org))

Zero to Three: National Center for Infants, Toddlers & Families ([www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org))

## Additional Publications

Investments in Early Childhood: An essential industry that is both good for business and vital to Montana's economy. Executive Summary, May 2008 ([www.dphhs.mt.gov/hcsd/childcare](http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/hcsd/childcare))

Early Childhood Business Summits: Challenges and Opportunities for Montana's Workforce, 2009 ([www.montanakidscount.org](http://www.montanakidscount.org))

Investing in America's Children: The Business Case. Partnership for America's Economic Success, PEW Center on the States.

What Business Leaders Can Do/ Partnership for America's Economic Success, PEW Center for the States. ([www.partnershipforsuccess.org](http://www.partnershipforsuccess.org))

## Contact

For more information contact Montana Kids Count at:

**[www.montanakidscount.org](http://www.montanakidscount.org)**

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For more information, contact Montana Kids Count at 406-243-5113, or visit [www.montanakidscount.org](http://www.montanakidscount.org). You may also contact Billie Warford with Early Childhood Solutions at 406-587-7431. Additional copies of this publication are available from Montana Kids Count.

Please inquire directly to learn more.



Department of Public Health and Human Services  
Early Childhood Services Bureau

