

Montana Head Start Association  
April 7 & 8, 2006  
Great Falls, Montana

**Present:** Mary Jane Standaert, Debra Lindstrand, Susan Goffena, Judy Bryngelson, Robyn Willett, Dorcella Flatmouth, Anita Birdinground, Nina R. Yellowtail, Wendy Bull Child, Betty Williamson, Denise Incashola, Melissa Evans, Andi Everingham, Cindy Sinclair, Kathryn McLeod, Reneé Funk, Barb Brophy, Mona Fergerson, Joan Davies, Cal Spangler, Peggy Rayome, Krista McCune, Stacey Scarborough, John Filz, Darrel Christensen, Shawna Hooper, Scot Anderson, Karla Seaman, Andrea Savage, Christina Barto, Todd Lester, Melinda Edwards

Facilitator: Peggy Rayome, Timekeeper: Kathryn McLeod, Recorder: Christy Hill Larson

**Steve Yeakel: Montana Advocates for Children (MAC) Lobbyist**

Steve addressed the Association about preparing for the 2007 Legislative Session. MAC most likely will be his only legislative contract that is not year around. He discussed strategies to prepare for the session:

- Safe to say Governor Schweitzer has both friends and enemies in the legislature
- Early childhood issues should do well again, but there is no certainty
- At this point, he can't find a revenue report; but there should be new money in the system and MAC will be one of several groups that will ask for it
- Need for involvement stays the same
  - Early childhood advocates need to be present and visible
  - We need to facilitate the conversation so early childhood can tell its story; when early childhood tells the story the Legislature listens; particularly when parents tell their personal stories
- We have a lot of relationships to maintain; and new ones to make
- During this preprimary period right now we should be focused on what is going on in state government. The Executive Planning Process (EPP) is the Governor's budget that will be presented to the Legislature. We need to see in the EPP where our issues are.
- Make general contact with legislative candidates; best work at present is to talk with legislators that you know well. Expose them to your organization and your roll in the community. Offer them open doors to your facility and on a less invasive level offer them your expertise; what you know about your community and your families. If you can be someone a legislator can contact that is a good thing.
- For families: report that you sat in on this session and raise the issue that family input is so important. Legislators need real people with real stories to back them up
- Sounds like there maybe some changes in the make up of the Legislature. The champions we know will not change drastically. Testifying publicly and knowing them personally is powerful.
- More work can be done with Native American Legislators

- **List of two dozen that are friends and need attended to:**
  - **Senate:** Dan Weinberg (D) Whitefish, John Cobb (R) Augusta, Trudi Schmidt (D) Great Falls; John Esp (R) Big Timber, Gary Perry (R) Manhattan, Bill Tash (R) Dillon, Mike Cooney (D) Helena, Dave Lewis (R) Missoula, Carol Williams (D) Missoula, Greg Lind (D) Missoula
  - At some point during the session they have to work out some difficult internal budget issues. It will be difficult to sort out early childhood issues from TANF issues. Sometimes looks like they are in competition. Senator Lind stepped through that well he hit the middle ground.
  - **House:** Jeanne Windham (D) Polson, Joey Jayne (D) Arlee; Eve Franklin (D) Great Falls, Veronica Small-Eastman (D) Lodge Grass,. Wanda Grinde (D) Billings, Elsie Arntzen (R) Billings, Penny Morgan (R) Billings (challenging person and needs attention from us), Bill Warden, (R) Bozeman, Mary Caffero (D) Helena, Christine Kaufman (D) Helena. Theresa Henry (D) Missoula
  - Many more constitutional candidates in the race this year
  - Focus on those likely to win in November
  - After the primary; have a chat and talk about key races
  - As a volunteer not limited to who you can share your expertise
  - NEVER FORGET YOUR ROLE IN THE PROCESS
  - Make plans to come to the session at least 2-3 or three times. January 11, 2006 MAC Legislative Breakfast
  - Steve's Toll free number 888-446-1674 (feel free to call him with questions)

**Scot Anderson gave two reports: Montana Advocates for Children (MAC) & Montana Early Childhood Advisory Council (MECAC)**

1) **MAC:** Montana Head Start Association, Montana Child Care Association, Montana Association for the Education of Young Children, Montana Child Care Resource and Referral Network make up the coalition.

- Mary Jane Standaert is the facilitator of the group.
- There was a budget discussion; since there is no longer Children's Defense Fund money, may need additional money (beyond what has been raised for the lobbyist) to put on the Legislative breakfast, send out mailings and pay for conference calls during the session.
- A "Day on the Hill" is scheduled for September 15, 2006. MtAEYC is sponsoring this activity to develop and train new legislative advocates.
- MAC began discussing their Legislative agenda
  - "Bridging the Gap" a proposal that grew out of the Children as Scholars program, would apply to children who attend Head Start and Two Star Quality child care programs. When children lose eligibility for child care but are still eligible for HS/EHS services, the Bridge the Gap proposal would make them eligible for the rest of the fiscal year. It was not

included in the Human and Community Services Division EPP. At this point Montana Child Care Association is opposed to the proposal.

2) **MECAC:** meets quarterly to advise the Early Childhood Services Bureau.

- New Early Childhood Services Bureau (ECSB) Chief is Jamie Palagi
- Human & Community Services Division put out a list of priorities for the EPP that may or may not be included in the Health and Human Services Department final EPP and may or may not be included in the Governor's budget
  - Number one priority of division is General Fund increase for child care. The increase would cover an annual adjustment to keep pace with federal poverty level, annual provider rate increase that would keep up with 75% percentile of the market rate, and increase numbers of children that are able to participate.
  - CACAAP additional general fund for administration of that program
  - Move Child protective services child care dollars through ECSB
  - Child Care benefits for working relatives
  - Discretionary increase from TANF transfer
  - Early Childhood Consultation
  - Budget transfer that would replace funding with general funding as a more stable funding source
- Other MECAC discussion:
  - Child Care regulations say that child care is paid on a daily rate; would like to see the language changed so that a monthly rate could be charged.
  - A discussion took place on the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) organizational change. The feeling is that separating Head Start and Child Care is not something they want to do. Not liking linking TANF and child care together. There is a concern about centralization of power in Washington DC and not being responsive to needs of rural western states. A letter was written by MECAC to ACF to express concerns.
  - Major discussion came up regarding Head Start operating full day services and receiving reimbursement through Best Beginnings and rules specifically for Head Start. Issue mainly is that providers are required to charge parents a fee and if you have a mixture of kids, some who are eligible and some who are not to receive state pay. Generally programs scholarship the kids who qualify for HS and not child care. ECSB staff will compare federal regulations and state regulations to see if a rule change is necessary.

### **Region VIII Head Start Association Report: Stacey Scarborough**

There is a meeting coming up and NHSA Parent of the Year and Beating the Odds awards will be announced. Montana has not nominated anyone this year. The other **NHSA awards will be due by September 27, 2006 at the Montana Head Start Association meeting.** Stacey said it would be good to be able to report to the Regional Association: how many programs are asking for reductions and what do programs want to get out of the Regional Conference.

**NHSA Report: Reneé Funk**

There has not been a NHSA meeting since the last report. Reneé will send out a written report after the next meeting. She mentioned that Region VIII is very different from the other Regions and she feels that not much weight is given to their concerns.

**Booze Allen Hamilton Region VIII T/TA Report: Todd Lester and Melissa Edwards**

- Elaine Shea from Region XI sends best regards; she is unable to attend this meeting
- Head Start Bureau was reorganized and a new head of Head Start was appointed, Todd sent around a press release
- Feed Back form: the Regional Team has requested a feedback form to be completed by program after each visit, they do read them. If you can communicate your needs, the Regional Office can respond.
- PIR training: The training was held in Helena. Havre, all four of the modules will be offered there, Billings is May 5 all four at the Billings center, the Health Managers training will offered in Helena in May. All programs are invited, Todd and Melinda will get information to all programs in the Association.
- Steps to Success kit, every program should have received it. If you haven't you should contact your TA Specialists.
- A conference call is scheduled for April 11, 9:00 MST, to review the Steps to Success kit and cluster training will be scheduled. Both Region VIII and Region XI programs are invited; however you need to RSVP to set up the correct number of lines for the call.
- Todd will follow up with Elaine to make certain the Tribal programs included.

**Program Updates:**

**Kootenai Valley Head Start:** the school district is moving kindergarten to another elementary building, but will keep the preschool disabilities classroom in the same location. The director is working on getting a child care license and offering child care at that site.

**Young Families Early Head Start:** They need to move and are working on getting a new building in few years. They are negotiating with the city council to obtain the Naval Reserve Building

**Deer Lodge County Head Start:** They survived St. Patrick's Day. This week they are celebrating the Week of the Young Child (WOYC). They partnered with the Library, and librarians came to read stories to children in the classrooms. They held a parade and will have a carnival for all children. Graduation is set for this spring.

**Bozeman:** They discovered mold in one building and had to close down that center, they are now in the basement of a child care partner. Things are going along pretty well.

**Butte:** Still waiting since Nov. 14, for an on-site repot. They are celebrating 40 years this year and are working on planning a celebration. They are inviting former staff,

children and parents. Carol Williams, a state legislator from Missoula is a former staff and will be invited to attend the celebration.

**Northwest Montana Head Start:** Review coming up, making good progress on new building, playground equipment got delivered. Have hired two new managers, a fiscal manager and a family services manager and a new admin assistant.

**Northern Montana Early Childhood Development Center:** Looking at adding on to HRDC building to house Head Start; but funding is an issue. Decided not replace the transition specialist. Frank had knee surgery. WOYC Carnival will be held on Saturday. They are having a children's art auction as a fundraiser, an idea they got from Head Start Inc.

**Confederated Salish & Kootenai Early Childhood Services:** They have a review scheduled in two weeks. All centers are in great shape, however their administration building is situated where a highway is planned to be developed, so they will be moving to a new site. Their 31<sup>st</sup> annual Pow Wow will take place this year.

**Blackfeet Early Childhood Services:** They have finally moved into new building, following a fire at their old building. They had a follow-up review and have resolved the two issues that needed attention. They held a mini basketball tournament which was very successful. They are working on their 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration and are planning a Pow Wow.

**Crow Head Start:** Finished and submitted their continuation grant. They have been notified they are up for a review; but haven't heard when it will take place. Getting ready for annual parent conference and the theme is "Celebrating Parents as Teachers". They have developed a Crow Culture & Language curriculum, which has been endorsed by the Tribe. It will be used as a foundation to develop it for other levels. They are working with Homeland Security; which opens the possibility of new buildings. They will soon hold their annual Cultural Week. They partner with the local college and hold a Pow Wow, health education day, family day, basketball tournament, fun walks, all activities are geared around Head Start and Crow Culture. The entire community is involved. Appreciation Day (graduation day) is scheduled this spring. Some of their classes are now full year.

**Head Start Inc.:** During WOYC, Curious George visited and read to children and families. After several years, they are discontinuing all child care partnerships. They have asked for a reduction of 26 slots to deal with 1% budget cut. After 25 years, Judy is retiring as Executive Director in December of this year.

**Central Montana Head Start:** Debra Lindstrand and a staff member from her program met with an association of school administrators. They were introduced as the girls from Head Start; however there was a great deal of interest by the time they finished. They attempted to get Harlow interested in HS. They have a meeting scheduled with the Superintendent there and other administrators are interested. CMHS is cutting child care

partnerships for various reasons. The child care slots will be moved to center based program in Lewistown. Roundup continues to have a waiting list and will move from combination classroom to a regular part day Head Start classroom. They submitted their grant and had more work on salary justification and teachers jobs; also had to do a lot more research and job justification on medically underserved. They have hired a new Health Coordinator. Debra recommended attending Fred Pryor seminar trainings. Microsoft has on line trainings that are free. They are restructuring for effectiveness and efficiency. Debra said that if you purchase from Discount School Supplies they will contribute to the NHSA Dollar Per Child Campaign (DPCC). If you call Jay Lerman at 1-800-836 9515 x 2522 he may give you a better deal.

**Opportunities Inc.:** Head Start has participated with Opportunities Inc., strategic planning. The number one priority is service to children. Every year for WOYC, each class decorates the doors with a book theme. They gave out 800 maracas at the children's activity fair with Head Start contact information. They were chosen for a NRS audit. They are planning for next years activities and are working with the Great Falls Public Schools to further develop the partnership.

**Child Start Inc.:** Enrollment has been strong this year and they have a waiting list, which Scot attributes that to more children living in poverty. He continues to do management training with many new staff. Looking for new classroom space; where they had a satellite site for 10 years at an elementary school, they will no longer have that space available. Child Start management and the employees union will start negotiations soon. WOYC activities included a parade, a Resource Fair for the Community, and a teddy bear picnic for the kids,

**Ravalli Head Start:** Their program is doing strategic planning and talking about a significant reduction in numbers of children; lots of stress involved. They participated in many WOYC and partnering with AEYC on a workshop. Major problem they are facing is big change in their mental health program.

**Missoula Early Head Start:** Just finished grant and asked for significant reduction in number of children serving. Board and Policy Council have voted it on the past two meetings. They are working on strategic planning and work plan. There were activities held in conjunction with WOYC activities.

**AWARE Early Head Start:** Finished training plan and strategic plan. They are looking at multiage classroom to reduce costs. EHS is in the process of looking for a new home base visiting specialist.

**Sherrie Downing: Coordinator for the Montana Council on Homelessness and Editor of the *Prevention Connection*.** Sherrie described Homelessness in Montana; handed out draft of the ten year plan to end homelessness in Montana. She asked Association members to talk about how they serve homeless families and children. There were lots of questions and discussion around homelessness. Betty Williamson reported in Indian country that families are not considered homeless; there is always a place for

them to stay with a relative. Sherrie mentioned the Montana Council on Homelessness website and said it had lots of good information on it. <http://www.mtcoh.org/>

**MT Head Start/State Collaboration Director's Report: Mary Jane Standaert—**

below are the notes she used to present to the Association

Head Start Association – April 6 & 7, 2006

Great Falls, MT

1. Head Start programs in HRDCs – you are invited to a training called Family Development Certification Training. Who from your programs is attending? I would like to know about the quality and usefulness for the other Head Start programs. And if appropriate who from this group would be interested in presenting?
2. We have been awarded a grant from the National Governor's Association for the school readiness summit. They are very interested in what we are doing.
3. The MOU on disabilities services is developing. I have had lots of edits. Not sure how long that will take, but will work with Vicki Greening to get it completed. Thank you for editing to make it correct.
4. Early Childhood Partnership for Professional Development – making a matrix of professional development entities.
5. Evaluation Review: Periodically it is important to stop and reflect on what we all know and don't know about what we do. Each year you are approached to answer questions about what you know about what the Collaboration Office (namely Christy and myself) does. The survey or interview sort of puts you on the spot, but we greatly appreciate you taking the time, being honest and making an effort. However, when I read the report – I am always amazed and the accolades and disturbed by anything negative. But we are big girls and negative comments or suggestions make us grow, learn and think differently about something. The comments are all anonymous so I can't address things individually. So I have grouped them by subject to address. Most are not negative, but are suggestions that we may or may not be able to do.

**Evaluation Issues for the Head Start Association - April 2006**

Arranged suggestions into topic areas to clarify or commit to.

1. Collaboration Grant is available to you annually. Conducting surveys on whatever? We have in the past and it has been helpful, but only when it is very necessary because we are all busy and it is hard to get them back. But if you have some suggestions on topics – I am willing to consider.
2. Tribal program involvement – I would need specific suggestions on this one. We have worked for 8+ years and it appears that things are improving quite a bit. We are all in Head Start together and we have worked hard at not keeping any one group separate.

3. Medical, dental and disability services – I could be here all day reviewing all that we have done in these areas. I can't get you more dentists and doctors and I can't seem to get Medicaid changed but

4. Training – MBI and state dollars for training. We can no longer supply training directly. Over the past I snuck it in through clusters and scholarships in the early days, but then that had to be left to the T/TA system. But we have preached for you to get involved in the state professional development system – there is money there and opportunities. We put money into MBI every year so that Head Start people have scholarships. We supplied money for Rocky Boy Head Start to have the Between the Lions Literacy program for Native American Head Starts. We are working diligently with OPI on professional development issues in the ECPPD. Christy works herself into a frenzy at each meeting about training and makes sure that all is organized and what you have requested. We put our initial carryover \$ into the initial computer system for the EC career development system, when we can we work with the T/TA system to support your needs. In the past we targeted certain issues with supplemental grants: Fatherhood, children's mental health, oral health and advocacy are a few. Since day one we have encouraged you to use Child Care plus+ at U of M as a source of training and information on disabilities.

My job is the system and getting Head Start connected to the system that exists and improving the system to best serve all.

5. Information on Head Start and recruiting parents – I assume you all have truck loads of HS brochures from the bureau. We have printed and given out tons over the years. But we don't recruit parents.

6. State funding for Head Start – be careful what you ask for.

7. Americorps VISTAs - for three years we hosted 4 different VISTAs and tried to sell the program to you all and even had training for all of you that were interested. They are always looking for new sites all you have to do is ask. I sent out an email recently with the latest recruiting info, so if you were interested, I hope you responded.

8. Working with school administrators – we are a local control state and there is no one at the state level that can make schools do anything over what is mandated. While we can go to the state groups and make a plea, it is up to you and the relationships you create and nurture at the local level.

9. Visiting programs and facilitating local collaboration. I would love to do more of this. In the early years we went to every program and over the years we have returned to most many times. But I hate to waste your time. But you are right it is time to come visiting. And if invited, we can assist with local collaboration – forming, training, and information sharing, whatever you need.

10. Three limitations of the Collaboration Office are: training, direct service to staff and parents and lobbying. The three goals are: access to services, collaboration that supports HS capacity to be a partner with the state, and HS involvement in state plans and decisions that affect the low income population.

Legislators	CC state plan, on MECAC
Teams report for recruiting	Governor's Office
HM/HB	Mental Health
Oral Health	OPI
Professional Development	CCR&R
ECSB – CACFP, CC/HS,	MAC/MtAEYC

**Jamie Palagi: New Early Childhood Services Bureau Chief**

Jamie introduced herself, talked about her background and continuing to strengthen the partnership between Head Start/Early Head Start and ECSB. She discussed the EPP and what was included and not included from the Human and Community Services Division. She will find out about Higher Ed Merit Pay and get back to us. (\*Note: Jamie looked in to Higher Ed Merit Pay and Head Start staff would be eligible. I can send you a copy of the rules if you need.)

**Committee Reports:**

**Governmental Affairs:**

The new reorganization plan is not a particularly good plan for us in this state and region. There is concern about scaling back the Regional Offices and the fear of transfer of money state to governments. It was suggested sending a letter to Secretary Mike Leavitt addressing issues of the capacity of a centrally driven office in Washington, DC working well for rural western states. Hank Hudson, Human and Community Service Division Administrator, said at MECAC that the Regional office staff has been instructed not to comment on the reorganization. In other national news: Chris Dodd and Ron Coleman have proposed to replace the 1% cut and add 2.7% on the Senate side of the bill.

Members of the Governmental Affairs Committee will compose and send a letter to the Secretary of HHS, with copies sent to the Montana Congressional Delegation, and the Regional Head Start Association. The letter will discuss the new structure of the Head Start Organization:

- Vertical separation between child care and Head Start at the top of the ladder
- Moving all the decision up line contradicts decisions made at the local level
- Politicize the decision making
- Communication flow
- The lack of awareness of western states rural issues with people in the east. Western states Tribal programs and effectiveness of the centralizing

in the eastern part of the country is an example of how the system does not efficiently

Bridging the Gap (discussed in the MECAC report)

- Scot and Mary Jane will write a more clear explanation of what Bridging the Gap is. Illustrating that it does not take money away from child care. They will share the explanation with the ECSB and take the issue up with MAC as being a possible MAC legislative issue.

A discussion took place about what we mean when we say “PreK”. Many people define PreK as a program for four year olds. In Montana, when we talk about PreK we mean 0-5 comprehensive system. If there comes a time when there is a push for state funded PreK similar to what happened to five year olds and kindergarten we want to have a say in how it is formulated

### **Three important dates for 2007 Legislative Session**

1. September 15, 2006 Day on the Hill; a training sponsored by MtAEYC to train new legislative advocates. 12 from our Association are invited to participate. When nominating someone to attend, think about Steve Yeakel’s list of Legislators that are open to hearing and championing early childhood issues.
2. Jan 11, 7-10 AM Legislative Breakfast
3. Head Start Day at the Legislature at the same time as the winter Mt Head Start Association meeting

### **T/TA Committee**

They used the survey taken in Lewistown a year ago to plan the trainings for the next three meetings and will do another survey in the fall.

- Fall meeting: Ongoing monitoring—Melinda, Todd and Elaine will coordinate the training. The training for Directors will take place the day before the Association meeting. Thursday & Friday there will be training for other HS/EHSstaff in each area.
- Winter Meeting: Mental Health
- April meeting: Disabilities

### **Native American Committee**

The committee members spent time networking and discussing:

- Training Collaborations between Region VIII and Region XI programs in Montana. Viola will oversee the collaborations
- Issues with grants
- Leave policies
- Unfunded mandates.

### **Finance/Nominating/Personnel Committee**

- Budget Report was handed out
- There were no nominations submitted for Parent of the Year or Beating the Odds

- Christy will send out annual Region VIII Office feedback forms to HS/EHS directors; compile the information, send the compiled information to Ross Weaver and MT HS/EHS Region VIII programs.
- Christy will send out a personnel evaluation form to all directors. In Viola's absence, Scot Anderson volunteered to do the evaluation review with Christy

**Next Meeting Dates:**

**September 28 & 29<sup>th</sup>** for the Head Start Association Meeting (27<sup>th</sup> for ongoing monitoring for Directors) hosted by the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Early Childhood Services

**Winter—Helena (NOTE:** This date is to be announced; Capitol Rotunda was not available the first two weeks of February).

**April 12 & 13, 2007 Billings**

**Meeting Evaluation:** each member had an opportunity to critique and comment on the meeting

- Networking time is good; suggested direction for networking time
- Good facility to meet in
- Interesting meeting and like the sharing
- There was a suggestion to have a written evaluation as well as verbal
- Homeless discussion was helpful
- Appreciate being able to vent concerns
- Thanks to Great Falls for hosting the meeting and organizing the training—Kathy Olson, Andrea Savage, and Karla Seaman
- Felt the homelessness discussion went on way too long; how cool to be on reservation and no one homeless
- Program updates; if we have a topic to think about before hand
- E-mail Christy if you have ideas for update topics
- Beautiful building; informative meeting; love the networking
- Homeless presentation prompted discussion; appreciate input during the directors meeting. Good feedback on cluster training
- Send in data for wage survey
- Good to see all of you
- T/TA helpful to plan a year in advance
- Unclear about the mental health piece
- Very interesting for someone attending the first time
- Thanks to all for being here and to Kathy Olson
- Enjoyed the meeting; this meeting and last meeting two best association meetings that can recall in recent times
- I enjoyed the meeting; wish for more parent involvement
- Better meetings in recent history; information overload
- Nice place
- Meeting was good, enjoyed committee meeting

## Answers to questions that came up at the Mt Head Start Association meeting regarding Higher Ed Merit Pay and the MT Apprenticeship Program

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**From:** Lutz, Cheryl (ACF) [mailto:clutz@acf.hhs.gov]  
**Sent:** Thursday, March 09, 2006 1:42 PM  
**To:** Hill-Larson, Christy  
**Subject:** Montana Apprenticeship Credential (MAC)

Please forward this email to Mary Jane.

A few years ago, Mary Jane shared discussed (via email) the MAC. At that time, no grantee had requested a determination of whether or not the MAC was equivalent to or exceeded the CDA credential.

Good news - the program in Havre requested a determination and we got one from the Head Start Bureau. The Head Start Bureau verified that the MAC includes a birth to five teaching component, supervised field experience, and an assessment of competence and is therefore recognized as an alternative to the CDA credential.

So teachers who received the MAC would be considered qualified as stipulated in the Head Start Act and the performance standards.

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Jamie Palagi, Lisa Murphy, and Patti Russ from the ECSB all agree that Head Start staff is eligible for Higher Ed Merit Pay. See below.

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### **Higher Education Merit Pay Eligibility**

Early childhood professionals must be working a minimum of 15 hours a week in:

- A registered group or family child care home,
- A licensed child care center,
- A Montana Head Start, Early Head Start or Tribal Head Start, or
- A Montana Child Care Resource & Referral Agency.

Applicants must also be current members of the Montana Early Care & Education Practitioner's Registry.

Qualifying individuals who are in the process of applying for child care

licensure or registration may apply for Higher Ed. Merit Pay; however, award funds will not be released unless the licensure/registration process is completed. (The establishment of a PV number in CCUBS provides the necessary verification.)

Higher Education Merit Pay will be awarded to approved applicants participating in at least six college credits per semester. Individuals may receive this award in each of two semesters per year for an award of \$750.00 per semester and a maximum award of \$1,500.00.

To receive a Higher Education Merit Pay award, applicants must be participating in a college program that leads to a credential or degree in Early Childhood/Child Development. They may also be participating in a college program that emphasizes Early Childhood and leads to a Level IV or higher on the Montana Early Care & Education Practitioner's Registry.