



ZEROTOFIVE
MONTANA

A TOOLKIT FOR PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS: **Your Guide for School- Based Child Care**



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INTRODUCTION

Education and development start well before a child enters kindergarten, and yet, a vast percentage of Montana's youngest children do not attend any type of early learning program. Oftentimes, this is due to a lack of accessible, affordable, quality early care and education. Public and private schools are an integral part of the local infrastructure across the state, both urban and rural, and present a unique opportunity to be leaders in tackling this issue.

In Montana, approximately 65% of children under the age of six have all available parents participating in the workforce, however, Montana's supply of early care and education slots, based on licensed capacity, meets only 44% of the need.¹ Lack of care results in an estimated 317 million dollar economic loss for our state and leaves our youngest children unprepared to enter formal schooling.²

This comprehensive resource has been developed to support and guide your public or private school in establishing a high-quality early care and education program that will benefit both your students and their families.

As educators, you are well aware of the critical importance of early learning in laying the foundation for lifelong learning and success. Research consistently shows that providing quality early experiences has numerous positive outcomes, ranging from improved academic performance and social-emotional development to increased school readiness and decreased achievement gaps.

Furthermore, public and private schools across Montana, especially those in rural communities, struggle with attracting and retaining qualified workers. By opening an on-site or near-site early care and education program, K-12 schools hiring faculty and staff with children can increase their chances of solving their labor challenges by making care more accessible.

This toolkit is designed to be a practical, user-friendly guide walking schools through the process of establishing an on-site or near-site early care and education program. It includes valuable information, resources, and best practices gathered from experts in the field of early childhood and school-based early education programs.

We hope this toolkit will serve as a valuable resource and support system for your school as you embark on the journey of supporting early learning in your community. By investing in the well-being and development of our youngest learners, we are laying the groundwork for a brighter future for our state.



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ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

The child care ecosystem is complex, especially for those unfamiliar with the requirements, services, and supports existing in Montana. This toolkit aims to offer some clarity to public and private schools as they navigate the system with the objectives to:

- Provide Montana schools with detailed information about the benefits of providing on-site or near-site child care for its employees;
- Identify steps required to obtain a child care license or registration; and
- Outline tools to ensure the safety and success of a child care program

This document is a general guide for those interested in offering on-site or near-site child care as a benefit to current or prospective employees and/or the broader community. The structure of the toolkit guides you through three general phases: exploratory, planning, and operational planning.



[LEARN MORE](#)

→ [Montana's Child Care Ecosystem](#) ←

1

Exploratory

Offers guiding questions to help you think about the various options, aspects, and needs of offering on-site or near-site child care.

2

Planning

Offers resources and guidance on business planning, staffing, and other important aspects of operating a child care program.

3

Operational Planning

Offers resources and reminders about some of the operational items that may be overlooked during the planning phase.

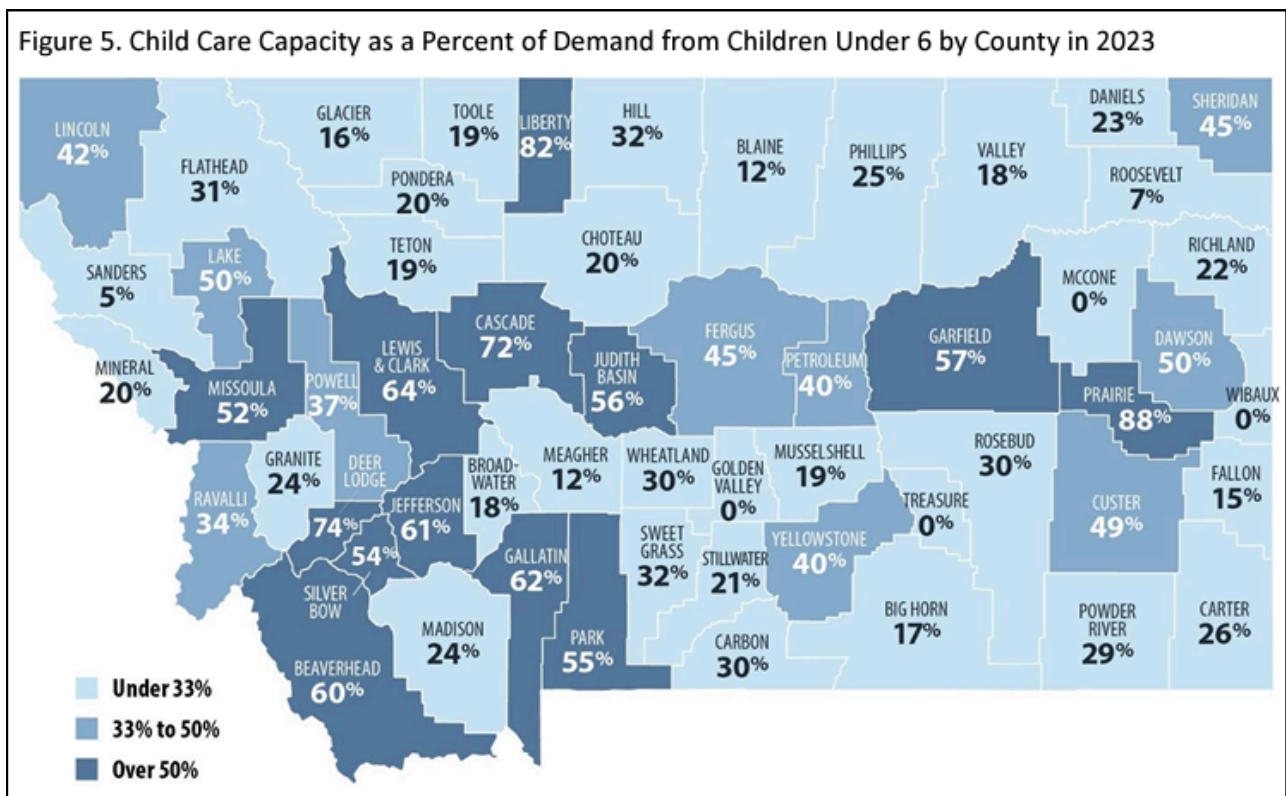
Remember, it's important to consult with local and state authorities, and legal professionals to ensure compliance with specific regulations and requirements in Montana. There are a variety of resources scattered throughout this document that are willing and ready to help.

Note: early care and education and child care will be used interchangeably throughout this document.

EXPLORATORY PHASE

Availability of Care

Montana recognizes a few different types of licensed/registered care. Below you will find the types of care in the state, as well as the current existing capacity (number of child care seats or slots) by county level. It is good to remember, that the current capacity shown below is a snapshot in time and will vary based on the ever-changing child care landscape. Additionally, this data is calculated using the maximum number of slots each child care program is authorized to care for, which can prove to be inaccurate if a program is unable to operate at full capacity due to a lack of staff or other operational challenges.



Source: MTDLI analysis of child care capacity data provided by MTDPHHS through 12/2023. MTDLI child care demand calculation based on U.S. Census Bureau 2022 Population Estimates Program (PEP) data provided by Montana KIDS Count and 2018-2022 American Community Survey (ACS) data produced by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Finding Child Care

Montana offers a statewide Child Care Providers Dashboard to search for licensed/registered child care providers by location. Check out the [Child Care Provider Dashboard](#) to learn more about your community. Additionally, there are regional Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (CCR&Rs) located across Montana that offer local expertise about child care providers in their region.



Resource: Your local Child Care Resource and Referral Agency (*Appendix A, Section 2*)

In Montana there are a variety of child care types. Schools should consider which type of child care works best for their community based on the need of the school and the available space.

Types of Licensed/Registered Child Care

- Family, Friend, Neighbor Provider is a Registered provider offering care in a child’s home or in the provider’s residence for a sibling group of any size or no more than four unrelated children.
- Family Home is a private residence in which care is provided for three to eight children on a regular basis and is considered Registered with a maximum number of three children under the age of two years.
- Group Home: is a private residence or other structure in which care is provided for nine to 15 children on a regular basis and is considered Registered with a maximum number of six children under the age of two years.
- Center: is an out-of-home place in which care is provided to 16 or more children on a regular or irregular basis and is considered Licensed. The child-to-staff ratio and maximum group size for a child care center are:
 - 4:1 for children newborn through 23 months with a maximum group size of 12
 - 8:1 for children two years through three years with a maximum group size of 16
 - 10:1 for children four years with a maximum group size of 24
 - 14:1 for five years and over with a maximum group size of 32

What is the difference between licensed and registered child care programs?

Child Care Centers are considered “licensed” with the state of Montana, while other types of child care programs are considered “registered” with the state of Montana. Both, show that the program is in compliance with the child care rules and regulations that are set by the Department of Health and Human Services.

Benefits of Being Licensed or Registered

Although taking the steps to license or register a child care program may feel overwhelming, there are a variety of benefits. The most obvious benefit is that licensure ensures the program is a safe and healthy place for young children to go. Below you will find additional benefits.



Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship

Families eligible for the Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship , which helps pay the cost of child care, are only able to utilize licensed or registered child care providers.



Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

Licensed and registered child care providers can participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) which ensures nutritional meals are being served. The CACFP offers training, resources, support and provides reimbursements to help offset the cost of food.



STARS to Quality

Licensed and registered providers are eligible to participate in the STARS to Quality Program. This program provides support, coaching, resources, and monetary incentives to help increase the quality of care being provided.



Staff Educational Incentives

The Early Childhood Project (ECP) offers various monetary incentives around educational advancements for child care staff. One example is the Professional Development Incentive Award-Higher Education which provides scholarships for the completion of early childhood college credits.

Internal Assessment

Schools exploring the possibility of offering on-site or near-site child care should first consider their own infrastructure and needs. It is also a good idea to consider the various business models.

Does my school have the infrastructure to house a child care program in or near the school?



This will be partially answered by the schools physical facility, and in part by the space requirements of the child care program type.

What business model will my school use to establish and run the child care program?



There are a variety of different business models to consider. The table on the next page offers a brief explanation of each model.

Note: Head Start and Early Head Start partnerships are not separated out specifically.

BUSINESS MODELS

Outside Contract

School

- The school usually provides the physical space (generally at a low cost) and has a contract or Memorandum of Understanding with the private child care business.
- Depending on the contract or MOU, the private child care may give priority to school staff children.

Child Care Program

- Any surplus revenue from the child care goes to the private child care business.
- The private child care business is responsible for the day-to-day operations.
- The private child care business creates the budget, sets tuition rates and salaries, markets the program, hires, trains, and supervises the staff.

Nonprofit 501(c)3

School

- The school usually provides the physical space (generally at a low cost) and has a contract or Memorandum of Understanding with the nonprofit child care program.
- Depending on the contract or MOU, the child care program may give priority to school staff children.

Child Care Program

- The child care board members directly influence the child care program and oversee the program Director.
- The child care program creates the budget, sets tuition rates and salaries, markets the program, hires, trains, and supervises the staff.
- Profits are reinvested into the child care program.

School-Sponsored

School

- The school absorbs the child care program as an extension of the school having more overall influence on the program operations and structure.
- The school, in collaboration with the program Director, creates the budget, sets the tuition rates and salaries, and hires, trains, and supervises staff.

Child Care Program

- The program Director is in charge of the day-to-day operations.
- All child care program staff are employees of the school district.
- School district staff's children have priority and the program may or may not be open for others in the community to utilize.

School-Partnered

School

- The school usually has a contract or Memorandum of Understanding with the private child care business.
- The school provides some support services to the private child care business (e.g., administrative support) and in turn receives some sort of benefit (e.g., a couple of priority spots for school staff to utilize for their children).

Child Care Program

- The private child care business is responsible for the day-to-day operations.
- The private child care business creates budgets, sets tuition rates and salaries, markets the program, hires, trains and supervises the staff.
- The private child care business provides its own benefit package to staff.

Child care programs vary based on circumstances including the needs of the families, the needs of the public or private school, and what the physical space offers. Below you will find some general topics to consider before you start the planning process. Although we cited the “School-Partnered” model, for the purpose of this toolkit, we will be focusing the remaining information on either on-site or near-site models. For assistance creating a school partnership with a private child care business, please contact our team at info@zerotofive.org.

Physical Site Considerations

Where will the child care be located (on-site or near-site)?

Here are a few things to consider:

- Emergency exit access
- Bathrooms
- Food preparation area
- Storage area
- Outdoor play area
- Appropriate fire safety
- Child rooms (for general care, play, and instruction)
- Diaper changing area with a sink (if applicable)

Funding Considerations

What funding source will be used to start and sustain the child care program?

Just like any other business, starting a child care program comes with initial startup costs. Document the uses of funds. An itemized list of specific startup costs will help inform sources of funds to pay for those costs.

Will the school offer a reduced tuition rate to employees and/or teen parents?

Child care programs can be a great way to recruit and retain employees for your school. They can also be a support service for teen parents within the school. Beyond offering a child care program that is convenient for school staff, schools can opt to offer additional child care incentives to staff such as reduced tuition rates. If reduced rates are offered to employees, inquire with a qualified tax professional regarding tax implications for how the individual will need to treat in-kind income.³

Teen parents attending school will most likely qualify for the state subsidy program (Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship) however that does not necessarily cover the total cost of care.

Can/will the child care provider accept children at a reduced rate?

There are varying ways reduced rates can be integrated into a program supported by a school, however, keep in mind that revenue is vital for a program to run successfully. If this is something your school is interested in, consideration of supplemental funding is imperative.



Program Spotlight

Shepherd Sprouts Daycare and Learning Center

School: Shepherd School District

Community: Shepherd, Montana

Model: School Sponsored

Summary

Shepherd Sprouts is an on-campus preschool and daycare program providing nurturing and developmentally appropriate child care for children ages 0-6. The daycare operates beyond traditional in-home group daycare and offers care while school staff is working. It is registered as a Group daycare with two staff members caring for 15 or fewer children based on their age and abilities. The dedicated staff, including a certified teacher and teacher's aide, provide learning and play opportunities both inside and outside. Additionally, preschool is provided for children two years before they begin kindergarten.

Incorporating Child Care Into the School

Shepherd School District recognized the need for quality child care for their staff, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic. During a major remodel in 2020, an empty building that previously housed the district administration and board room became available. The school administration and board seized the opportunity to create a child care center that would meet this need. The goal was to retain staff and support the growth and development of each child, allowing district staff to excel in their daily job at Shepherd Schools. The Child Care Director spent three months researching licensing requirements and developing a blueprint for the program. Once approved by the board, it took a couple of months to set up the program which opened its doors in August 2022 and is now preparing for its third year in operation in Fall 2024.

Decision-Making Process

The decision-making process involved various key individuals including:

- Shepherd School Board Chair
- Shepherd School District Superintendent
- Shepherd School District Elementary Principal
- Shepherd Schools Business Manager and District Clerk
- Child Care Program Director

Challenges

During the planning and implementation phase, several challenges arose, including:

- **Limited budget:** The daycare started without any startup funds. To overcome this, the daycare director reached out to local businesses for sponsorship and requested community donations of toys and other supplies.
- **Providing meals:** With only two staff members and 15 children, meal provision seemed daunting. However, the Food Service Director signed a contract with the daycare to provide meals, relieving a significant burden.



Priority for child care goes to school district staff. Care is contracted year-by-year based on a renewed or new contract with the district.

Highlights and Successes

Since its establishment, Shepherd Sprouts has achieved notable success, including:

- **Transition to kindergarten:** In the Fall of 2024, four daycare students successfully completed two years of preschool at Shepherd Sprouts and are now ready to join Shepherd Schools Kindergarten. This accomplishment is particularly significant considering the program started with no concrete plans just two years ago.
- **Positive feedback from Shepherd School District staff:** The daycare has received praise for the quality of care it provides to the staff members' children. The use of the Brightwheel app allows seamless communication and updates with parents, including sharing menus and lesson plans.
- **Interest from other districts:** Shepherd Schools has received numerous inquiries from other districts seeking advice on how to establish their own child care programs, indicating that Shepherd School District is on the right track.

What advice would you give to a school district exploring child care?

“Brainstorm, brainstorm, brainstorm. In order to get started, work with your local community and businesses to provide the funds for the first three months of operation before tuition will cover monthly costs.”

-Shepherd Sprouts Daycare and Learning Center Director

Staffing Considerations

Staffing a child care program is one of the more prominent challenges that presents itself. This is something your school will want to spend time strategizing.

Will the school be able to hire an appropriate number of staff?

Child care programs must operate with strict child-to-staff ratios at all times. These ratios are determined by the program type and the age of the children being served. This question can help a school decide which business model will fit best.

Will the child care program utilize Family and Consumer Sciences students?

Schools have a unique opportunity to utilize Career and Technical Education (specifically Family and Consumer Science) as workforce support.



Resource: FCS ([Appendix C](#))

Will the child care staff wages parody school employees?

One of the largest struggles private child care businesses face is the ability to pay staff living wages. The inability to offer living wages leads to high turnover. Many times, schools are positioned to be able to offer solutions around this challenge.

Will the child care staff benefits parody school employees?

Few child care businesses across Montana offer benefits to their child care staff due to cost. Many times, school are positioned to be able to offer solutions around this challenge.

Child Care Business Considerations

The child care business is a unique industry requiring owners and operators to think about both the operational pieces of a small business and the quality care and education of children.

Offering on-site, near-site, or employer-supported child care should be seen as a benefit to employees. However, the operation of the child care program should be created from the outset to be self-sustaining. With that in mind, a program should be built around the core tenants of business; market, operations, financials, and management. Additionally, depending on how the services are being delivered (by district staff, by a third-party contracted operator, or fully outsourced to a private entity) a program should be created so it is mutually beneficial to all parties involved.

Who makes up the administrative, operational, and oversight team?

Every business that starts and operates should be composed of subject matter experts cooperating to ensure checks and balances. These subject matter experts will likely be internal to the organization and external to the organization based on the levels and types of expertise needed on the project and to operate smoothly. For more on this topic, please refer to this [B.A.I.L. Team](#) resource.

How will the roles and responsibilities of the administrative, operational, and oversight team be determined?

All teams need leaders. However, too many cooks in the kitchen makes for a lack of clarity regarding who will do what by when. Clearly defining the roles of the team members helps to create clear communication channels in collaborative and complex projects like starting and operating an on-site or near-site program.

How will the child care program be financially capitalized?

Insufficient capitalization at the start of a business and throughout its lifespan is one of the most significant triggers to financial stress and ultimately, business failure. Accurately identifying the project's total cost should be a comprehensive exercise. These cost documentation exercises should include all project-specific needs related to facilities, renovations, equipment, furniture, fixtures, startup costs like additional insurance or security, third-party costs such as architectural or engineering, and the working capital necessary to operate moving forward. Any and all of these costs should also include a meaningful contingency for budgetary overages.

What is the timeline for implementation of the project?

If there is no clear timeline for completing the project, tasks will not be prioritized.

Will memorandums of understanding, contracts, and agreements be put in place to clearly articulate roles and responsibilities?

A lack of clear communication, especially in new or collaborative projects can create friction and discontent. These documents should be created from a place of mutual benefit amongst all parties involved in starting, operating, and sustaining collaborative projects.

Will the school have the ability to develop a comprehensive business plan and financial projections?

If so, a team lead on the creation of the plan and projections should be assigned. A comprehensive business plan, at minimum, will be a communication document for the members of the team while also documenting decisions made and future goals and objectives.

Are financial considerations being prioritized when making decisions?

Every decision in a business has a financial impact. Making go/no-go decisions based on the financial impact helps to ensure the overall viability and sustainability of a program.

Is the staffing pattern being comprehensively planned early in the process?

In a heavily regulated, service-based industry that is reliant on the availability of labor to be viable, the access to qualified labor and its annual turnover rate is vital to understand early on in the creation of a child care program. If, for example, access to labor is low, contingencies should be planned to account for staff shortages due to illness, injury, or turnover.

What age of children will the program serve?

Inquiring about the needs of school employees will help answer this question, however, it is good to note there are additional considerations such as staffing ratios that may need to be addressed if the program will serve infants and toddlers.

Who is the competition and what is the competitive environment?

A comprehensive competitive analysis of who else provides care in a community can assist in strategy. By understanding the other market players, a school-based program can better analyze how to enter the market, the age of children most likely to be served, market-based tuition rates, and how to be a member of the community. The goal of a new, school-based program should not be to put others out of business. It should be to offer an alternate type of care.

Assessment of Need

One of the most critical things a school can do before starting the planning phase of this work is to gauge the child care needs of employees. A *Child Care Needs Assessment Survey* can be used to determine what type of child care services employees would be most interested in.

What type of care is needed for the school employees?

The needs of employees may not be what you assume. It is best to get feedback regularly from the individuals your child care program is focused on serving.

Will the program offer care to teen parents within the school district?

Offering care to teen parents can be a resource that supports the student's attendance at school and removes the barrier of them finding care on their own. Some schools offer teen parents a parenting class where they learn more about their role as a parent including an expectation of time within the school-based child care to practice what they have learned under the guidance of a licensed teacher or child care director. If the school will offer care to teen parents, it may be a good idea to gather some data around this as well.



Resource: Child Care Needs Assessment Example (Appendix D)

PLANNING PHASE

Now that you have considered the different business models, types of child care programs, funding options, and assessed your internal infrastructure and needs, it is time to move into the planning phase. Check out this [New Facility Flow Chart](#) which provides a glance at the process of starting a new child care business.

Business Planning

The business model you choose will determine your future business planning. It is important to remember that child care is a standalone business, so creating a comprehensive business plan that outlines your goals, target market, and financial projections is a must. Luckily Montana has some great resources available to support you through the planning phase. On the next few pages, you will find specific business planning recommendations based on each type of business model.



Outside Contract Model Business Plan Recommendation

By utilizing this light-touch approach to providing care, a school may enter into a formal or informal agreement with a private, third-party business to own and operate a child care program on or near a school facility. This removes the responsibility of providing care and operating something additional from the school while also creating a pathway for faculty and staff to access a child care benefit.

Implications by the formality of the contracts or agreements vary, but the written documentation is extremely important. The benefits and terms of these types of arrangements vary by situation, but in nearly all cases, resources are shared and priority enrollment is given to school staff as a benefit offered as an employee.

In some cases, the contracted business is an established local child care provider or a national franchise. In other cases, this type of model could give a startup child care provider a boost to launching. In all cases, these third-party contractor relationships should be seen as, and created to be, mutually beneficial. Both parties should receive something beneficial from the relationship and overly restrictive expectations from either party should be limited.

Unfortunately, these types of relationships can become fractured when there is an appearance of power or control or when too many restrictions are placed on the contracted provider.

To increase cooperation, collaboration, and communication, a contract or memorandum of understanding or agreement should be drafted and agreed to by both parties. Contracts, MOUs, and MOAs often define who is doing what. They offer procedural guidance, set expectations, create open lines of communication, define the parties involved, contextualize the nature of and reason for the contract/MOU/MOA, formalize the dates of the agreement, and clearly define the use of spaces and resources, and if there are any financial obligations between the parties.



In all third-party contractor models, a school should have its own strategic, business, and financial plans to aid in evaluating proposal responses upfront while also ensuring viability during the operational terms of the agreement.



Resource: Memorandum of Understanding Outline (Appendix E)

Nonprofit 501(c)3 Model Business Plan Recommendation

The nonprofit model, unlike working with a for-profit entity contractor, will come with additional challenges.

Decision-making in nonprofits, due to their organization, can be slower. Schools should be aware of this difference to allow for sufficient discussion, decision, and determination periods by the contractor. One additional benefit to partnering with a nonprofit provider is the potential access to additional types of capital sources for starting and operating the business. However, it should be noted, that simply because a nonprofit provider is organized as such, that does not mean the business does not have to be cash flow positive.

School-Sponsored Model Business Plan Recommendation

A school-sponsored model is an all-in endeavor of the school. These are programs owned, operated, and controlled by the public or private school. Day-to-day marketing, operations, and financial management all need to be done by school staff.

This would also suggest that a child care industry specialist should be hired, or a staffer will need to be trained in industry specifics. Additionally, the school will need to hire a qualified director to operate the facility, comply with industry rules and regulations, and become knowledgeable about food and quality rating programs.

Much of the operational work of a child care program can be spread out across existing school staff, but there will need to be a singular manager of the program. Separate sets of financial statements should be created to ensure the program is financially self-sufficient or to know at what rate it is being subsidized by the school.

Note on Family and Consumer Sciences

It is noteworthy to mention the primary work of a licensed Family and Consumer Sciences teacher is to oversee the industry and workplace experiences of high school CTE students who wish to work within the child care industry. The qualifications to be a child care director or staff of a licensed or registered child care program is determined separately through a different process.



Resource: Montana Child Care Business Connect (Appendix A, Section 1)



Program Spotlight

Reed Point Community Child Care

School: Reed Point School District

Community: Reed Point, Montana

Model: Outside Contract

Summary

Reed Point Community Child Care is a project between Big Timber Daycare and Reed Point School District. The Reed Point School District needed to find a solution to the child care dilemma their teachers faced as they didn't have any child care offerings in Reed Point and there were two teachers with new babies. The program opened in August of 2023 Monday through Friday 7:30 am to 5:30 pm.

Incorporating Child Care Into the School

The Reed Point School District approached Big Timber Daycare (an established child care program) about a space that they wanted to offer in exchange for providing child care to their teachers. The school board approved the agreement and set out to begin building a child care program in Reed Point.

Decision-Making Process

The decision-making process involved various key individuals:

- Superintendent
- Principal
- Big Timber Daycare staff

Challenges

During the planning and implementation phase, several challenges arose, including:

- **Enrollment:** at the time this information was gathered, only four children were enrolled in the program (capacity is 15 children). Additional children were initially enrolled but discontinued due to the high cost of care.
- **Profitability:** The program has yet to be profitable.

Due to enrollment and profitability challenges, Big Timber Daycare/Reed Point Community Child Care is renegotiating its contract with the Reed Point School District. Lack of profitability has led to Big Timber Daycare absorbing operating losses. Proposals include:

1. Sell the child care business assets to the school to run.
2. Amend the contract with Big Timber Daycare continuing to run the program but Reed Point School District subsidizing staffing costs.



This program serves both the children of school district staff and children within the community at large.

Highlights and Successes

The school offers a large space for the program to operate. The school district also provides food for the children enrolled in the child care program and offers meals to the child care staff for a minimal cost.

The partnership with the school district was a different structure for Big Timber Daycare which was an overall learning curve, however, the staff within the Reed Point Community Child Care have become self-sufficient and are functionally well overall.

What advice would you give to a school district exploring child care?

“Really understanding the entire licensing process and realizing that this is a business and not a babysitting gig is crucial. Figuring out the break-even point for the program so you know if you have enough interest to make this a viable choice is also a huge step. Lastly settling on the model of business and supporting the provider that you choose.

It may be worth it to reach out to a child care partner that can 1.) Help you walk through the entire licensing and support process, or 2.) Hiring a child care support business that comes in and sets up the processes for you and can coach you through the challenges and take on some of the load of following state regulations.”

Reed Point Community Child Care / Big Timber Daycare staff

Find a Suitable Location

Identify a location that meets the requirements for a child care program, including safety, accessibility, and adequate space for children and staff. Remember, young children have different needs than K-12 children. It is recommended to always ensure compliance with zoning regulations and obtain any necessary local permits or licenses.

Child Care Licensing is the entity that determines if your intended location meets industry regulation requirements. Local planning departments determine occupancy and any jurisdiction-based requirements. There are several child care licensors located throughout the state available for questions. There are a variety of factors that should be considered when assessing a potential location. For example, each level of the facility used for child care purposes must have at least two means of emergency egress.



View the complete list of [Child Care Licensing Rules and Regulations](#).



Resource: Child Care Licensing (Appendix A, Section 3)

Funding

At this time, there is minimal funding available for child care startup costs. Many child care businesses have had to come up with creative solutions to obtain the capital needed. Explore a variety of funding options to support the establishment and ongoing operation of your child care program.

These could include:

- Loans and equity
- Private foundations
- Public programs (e.g., USDA Rural Development; Tax Increment Financing; Community Development Block Grant)
- Revenue diversification (e.g., fundraising, selling other types of products and services)
- Grants or reimbursable financial incentives
- School district funding (A & B for early literacy intervention)

Check out this [Financial Workbook](#) to get you started and continue to brainstorm with those in your community!



Staffing

It is good to recognize that licensed/registered child care programs have specific regulations around staff, the age of children being cared for, health and safety, and the actual care of the children.

General Requirements

Directors and all child care staff must complete an FBI fingerprint-based background check before working with children. Background checks can be completed at any of the Child Care Resource and Referral agencies or another location found [here](#). Both program directors and staff have specific qualifications they must meet.



[Program Director and Program Staff Qualification Requirements](#)

Additionally, Montana's [Early Care and Education Knowledge Base](#) is a helpful resource that showcases what early care and education practitioners need to know, understand, and be able to do.

Professional Development

Just like public school teachers, child care directors and staff must meet specific training requirements to be eligible to work in a licensed/registered program. This includes initial training for new staff and ongoing annual requirements.

The child care industry has a professional development database called the [Early Childhood Project](#) (ECP). The Early Childhood Project is dedicated to improving the quality of programs and services for young children and their families and works closely with partner organizations across the state to promote early childhood professional development. ECP provides resources, training opportunities, a job board, and information on the Montana Practitioner Registry, where early childhood professionals can track their professional development, access their learning records, and find qualified training. They also offer scholarships for educators in child care to complete coursework in early childhood education. For more information about the MT Practitioner Registry go [here](#).



Resource: Your local Child Care Resource and Referral Agency (*Appendix A, Section 2*) and your local Child Care Licensor (*Appendix A, Section 3*)

Workforce Opportunities

Pre-Apprenticeship Program

There may be an opportunity to utilize the Pre-Apprenticeship CDA Program offered in Montana. To learn more view Appendix B.

Family and Consumer Sciences Education

Work with your Family Consumer Science teacher to align pathway work-based learning. To learn more view Appendix C.

OPERATIONAL PLANNING PHASE

Best Practices

Using evidence-based practices in early care and education programs is crucial for the optimal development and well-being of young children. These practices are informed by research and have been proven effective in supporting children's growth across various areas, including cognitive, social, emotional, and physical domains.

Montana Resources



The [Montana Preschool Program Guidelines: A Resource for Teaching Children Ages 3 through 5](#) are program standards specifically for children ages three to five years. The standards define best practices in the field and high-quality early learning strategies that set children on the road to success.



The [Montana Early Learning Standards \(MELS\)](#) are designed to be a tool to help guide the work of early childhood professionals who are caring for and educating children from birth through age five years. The standards outline four core domains including emotional and social, physical, communication, and cognitive that each have specific standards within them.



Resource: Your local Child Care Resource and Referral Agency (*Appendix A, Section 2*)

National Resource Spotlight

The Head Start model was first established decades ago and has been built on evidence-based practices, using the best available science and teaching techniques to meet the needs of local communities. Head Start offers a variety of free resources that can be accessed by visiting eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov.



Curriculum

Early childhood curriculum refers to the planned activities, experiences, and interactions designed to promote the holistic development of young children, typically from birth to age eight. It encompasses a range of subjects and areas of development, such as cognitive, social-emotional, physical, and language development. A well-designed early childhood curriculum takes into account the individual needs and interests of children and provides them with meaningful and engaging learning experiences that support their overall growth and readiness for future schooling.

Selecting

To help guide you in selecting an early care and education curriculum that aligns with your program's goals and values, consider the following factors:

- **Research and Understand Different Approaches:** Familiarize yourself with the various curriculum approaches and philosophies available. Gain a thorough understanding of their core principles, instructional methods, and learning outcomes to determine which approach best aligns with your program's vision and philosophies.
- **Consider Developmentally Appropriate Practices:** Ensure that the curriculum you choose is based on developmentally appropriate practices. It should be designed to meet the unique needs and abilities of the children in your care, with activities and materials that are suitable for their age, interests, and level of development.
- **Assess Curriculum Components:** Evaluate the different components of the curriculum. Look for a curriculum that offers a well-rounded and comprehensive approach, addressing all areas of development, including cognitive, social-emotional, physical, and language skills.
- **Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness:** Choose a curriculum that values and respects the diversity of the children and families in your program. Ensure that it provides opportunities for children to learn about their own culture and the cultures of others, and incorporates materials and resources that reflect the backgrounds and languages represented in your community.
- **Flexibility and Adaptability:** Consider the flexibility of the curriculum to meet the unique needs of your program and individual children. Look for a curriculum that allows for adaptations and modifications to accommodate diverse learning styles, abilities, and interests.
- **Training and Support:** Find out what training and support are available from the curriculum provider. Assess if they offer professional development opportunities for teachers, access to online resources, and ongoing support to ensure successful implementation of the curriculum.
- **Parent and Family Involvement:** Consider how the curriculum encourages and supports parent and family involvement. Look for materials and resources that promote communication and engagement with families, as well as opportunities for parents to extend and reinforce learning at home.

- **Research and Evidence Base:** Examine the curriculum's research foundation and evidence base. Seek out a curriculum that has been field-tested, validated through research, and has a track record of positive outcomes for children's learning and development.
- **Continuous Evaluation and Improvement:** Remember that selecting a curriculum is not a one-time decision. Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the chosen curriculum and make adjustments as needed. Seek feedback from teachers, parents, and children, and consider newer research and best practices to ensure continuous improvement

Philosophy

Early care and education philosophy refers to the fundamental beliefs and principles that guide the approach and practices in providing care and education for young children. It encompasses the underlying values, theories, and goals that educators and caregivers hold about child development, learning, and well-being. A strong philosophy in early care and education recognizes the importance of creating a nurturing, safe, and inclusive environment that promotes the overall development of children. It emphasizes the significance of individualized and developmentally appropriate practices, fostering positive relationships between caregivers and children, and engaging families as partners in the educational journey. Ultimately, a well-defined philosophy serves as a foundation for shaping the curriculum, interactions, and policies in early care and education settings.



Check out our [Child Care Business Philosophies](#) resource.

School and Early Care and Education Program Relationship

Establishing a good and ongoing relationship between the school and the on-site or near-site child care program is crucial for the overall well-being and success of children and families. By working collaboratively, the school and child care program can create a seamless and cohesive transition for young children as they move from early care and education to kindergarten.

A strong partnership between both entities requires effective communication and regular information sharing. This partnership supports individualized learning and development, providing families with a sense of security and coordinated efforts to address challenges. Together, the school and early care and education program can work to foster unity, share resources, and professional development opportunities for high-quality education.



CONCLUSION

Exploring the possibility of offering an on-site or near-site early care and education program with support from your public or private school is a significant undertaking. It requires time, effort, and careful planning. However, it is important to remember that throughout this process, there are abundant resources, opportunities, and support available.

Access to high-quality early care and education has proven to be valuable assets for the recruitment and retention of employees, and this stands true for schools as well. By providing this essential service, schools can create a supportive environment for staff, promoting work-life balance and enhancing job satisfaction.

Moreover, offering early care and education opportunities for young children in your community plays a vital role in preparing children to enter kindergarten ready to learn. It sets a solid foundation for their educational journey, fostering their cognitive, social, and emotional development.

While the journey may have its challenges, the potential benefits outweigh the obstacles. Montana offers an abundance of resources and we encourage your school to rely on the numerous organizations and supports that are available to you, as well as learn from the various schools throughout the state that have established programs themselves.

In summary, the decision to offer an on-site or near-site early care and education program is a rewarding endeavor, both for employees and the community at large. With careful planning and supportive resources, school districts can provide a valuable service that positively impacts both the workforce and the future generation of students.

APPENDIX A: RESOURCES

Section 1: Montana Child Care Business Connect

Child care business-focused training: Montana Child Care Business Connect offers a range of training sessions and events to support the professional development of child care providers and community members. These trainings cover various topics such as program development, curriculum planning, business management, and marketing strategies. Events provide opportunities for networking and sharing experiences with peers, fostering a collaborative environment that contributes to the growth and improvement of the child care industry in Montana.

Technical assistance and Business Consultation: One-on-one support is a cornerstone of Connect's approach. We understand that every child care business is unique, facing its own set of challenges and opportunities. That's why we offer personalized, individualized guidance and support to providers and entrepreneurs. Our team of experts works closely with each business and program, conducting thorough assessments to identify areas for growth and improvement. Through one-on-one consultations, we provide tailored strategies, resources, and mentorship to help businesses thrive.

Community Child Care Capacity Building: With the community capacity building program, the goal is to engage communities and groups in identifying solutions to increase the supply of high-quality affordable child care. This is done through mobilizing community members and empowering the creation of community-based solutions (by preserving existing child care businesses and adding new child care slots). Community participants work together to evaluate, enhance, establish, and expand existing and/or new child care programs.

Peer child care business mentoring: Connect's Business Accelerator Mentorship Program is a comprehensive initiative designed to support child care business owners in Montana. Through the program, entrepreneurs are connected with experienced mentors who offer valuable insights and strategies to fuel the growth of their businesses. Zero to Five Montana recognizes that running any child care business can be challenging, and this mentorship program offers personalized guidance and support to meet the specific needs of each participant.

Resource Center: Web-based one-stop-shop for all child care business-related resources in Montana. We break down our free resources into three categories:

- **Pre-Venture:** Here you'll find resources that will help build a solid foundation for your business, including giving you the basics of child care in Montana and helping you jump-start your way to success!
- **Operations:** Operations cover a lot in business, these resources can include information on program structure, policies and procedures, improving business practices, and more.
- **Marketing:** This section provides valuable information and tools for child care providers looking to promote their business, attract new families and establish their brand.
- **Financial:** Child care providers need to have a solid understanding of financial management principles to ensure that their business is profitable and can continue to provide high-quality care. Our financial resources cover the basics of good money management.

Contact Information

Phone: (406) 513-1115

Website: childcarebusinessconnect.com

Email: connect@zerotofive.org

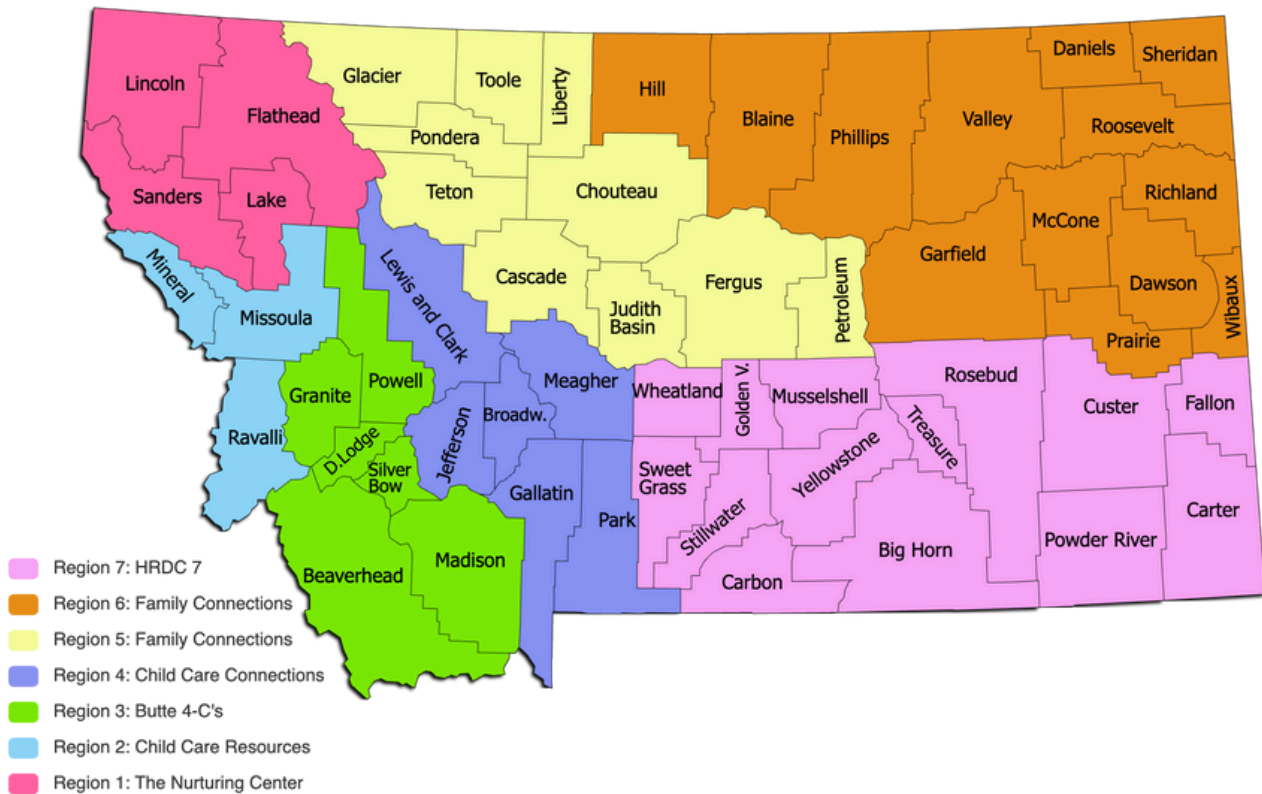
MONTANA CHILD CARE BUSINESS
CONNECT

Small Business Support. Big Community Impact.

Section 2: Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies

[Child Care Resource and Referral \(CCR&R\) agencies](#) offer a variety of services to both families and early care and education professionals. Six agencies are serving seven regions throughout Montana which can be viewed below. Each agency is unique and may offer more programs and services than the ones listed, however, each agency offers:

- New child care program onboarding
- Child care technical assistance (general operations, care, etc.)
- Professional development training for child care staff
- STARS to Quality support
- Fingerprinting services
- Financial assistance and grants
- Emergency preparedness support



Find your local Child Care Resource and Referral Agency's Contact Information [Here](#).

Section 3: Child Care Licensing

[Child Care Licensing](#) (CCL) establishes regulations for the health, safety, and well-being of children in licensed and registered programs. The role of CCL is to provide the following for licensed and registered child care programs, as well as those working to become licensed or registered:

- Monitoring
- Inspections
 - Pre-inspection and annually thereafter
- Support

Contact Information

Phone: (406)444-2012

Fax: (406)444-2750

Email: childcarelicensing@mt.gov

Section 4: Raise Montana

[Raise Montana](#) provides resources and coordination support to regional Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies and initiates projects to build child care supply and quality improvement. Two of their main project include the Montana Shared Services and the ECCE Substitute Service.

- [ECCE Substitute Service](#): connecting qualified substitute staff with local child Care programs
- [Montana Shared Services](#): offers a variety of services to child care programs at a reduced cost including:
 - Telehealth
 - Payroll
 - ECCE Job Board
 - Resources, Discounts, and Grants

For more information contact Raise Montana or visit their website.

Raise Montana's Contact Information

Email: info@mtchildcare.org

Send a Web Message: Click [here](#)

APPENDIX B

Apprenticeship Opportunities in Montana

Pre-Apprenticeship Child Development Associate (CDA)

The Pre-Apprenticeship program is a certified apprenticeship program through the Montana Department of Labor and Industry. It is designed to support individuals in completing a Child Development Associate Certificate (CDA). The cost of the CDA certification is covered by the Early Childhood Services Bureau.

Through the program, participants receive related technical Instruction hours that focus on the fundamentals of child development, family engagement, observation and assessment, program management, health and safety, and early childhood professionalism. The training for this program is provided free of charge through childcaretraining.org. A pre-apprentice will have the opportunity to learn while they earn, with the support of a mentor, and apply learned theory to practical experiences.

Montana Early Childhood Apprenticeship Program

Childcare Development Specialist

The Montana Early Childhood Apprenticeship Program is a registered apprenticeship program through the Montana Department of Labor and Industry. It is designed to support individuals in completing 24 college credits of early childhood education, leading to an Associate's Degree in Early Childhood Education. The credits for Early Childhood Education can be earned online or in person at one of the higher education institutions that currently have an articulation agreement with the apprenticeship program. Incentives provided by the Early Childhood Services Bureau help support the cost of completing these college credits.

An apprentice will have the opportunity to learn while they earn, with the support of a mentor. An apprentice will work to apply learned theory to practical experiences. Throughout the program, apprentices can earn at least two wage gains.

For more information about both the Pre-Apprenticeship and Apprenticeship programs, contact the Early Childhood Project or visit their website.

Montana Early Childhood Project Contact Information

Phone: 1-800-213-6310 or (406) 404-1624

Email: ecp@montana.edu

APPENDIX C

Family and Consumer Sciences Education: Programs and Pathways

Career and Technical Education

Career and Technical Education (CTE) prepares Montana K-12 students for a wide range of careers and post-secondary education options and can be found in Montana's middle schools, high schools, and career centers. CTE courses center around life and employment skills preparing students to go directly into the workforce or to continue their education with a higher degree of focus on their career goals. Montana has five approved CTE program areas including Family and Consumer Science.

CTE Pathway Alignment

There are two options within the CTE pathway offerings that can address the field of early care and education, based on the pathway age focus. The first pathway is Human Services which focuses on ages infant through age 5 years and the second is Education Pathway which focuses on ages 3-5 years.

Work-Based Learning

Work-based learning opportunities are a vital component of CTE pathways. Expected interactions with young children include:

- **Introductory experiences**
 - Examples: observing children, conducting safety checks on equipment and facility, and creating parent packets all under the oversight of the FCS teacher.
- **Technical experiences**
 - Examples: creating learning centers, preparing age-appropriate materials or interactive play, cleaning and sanitizing equipment and toys, supporting the lead teacher or center director, and direct interaction for specific learning events under the oversight of the FCS teacher.
- **Work-based learning experiences**
 - Examples: direct interactions with children under the oversight of the lead teacher such as teaching lessons, organizing outdoor play activities, or assisting with daily tasks such as meal time or nap time all under the oversight of the lead teacher at the center.

Family and Consumer Sciences Education

Family and Consumer Sciences Education (FCS) is found in middle and secondary schools across Montana. The focus of FCS is on life literacy, as well as workforce development within people-centered careers.

FCS Program Parameters:

Working with a licensed FCS teacher within an FCS program is considered vital to ensuring involvement of FCS students is successful within a school-based center. FCS programs offer a minimum of two full credits of courses, introductory at the foundational level and technical training with work-based learning experiences at the elective level. Courses offer opportunities to introduce, practice, and demonstrate mastery of technical knowledge and skills related to child development and providing care that meets the child's social, emotional, intellectual, and physical needs. For more information, review this [link](#) to the OPI website.

Family and Consumer Sciences Education are aligned to a career and technical student organization (specifically Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America) where child development knowledge, skills, and aptitudes/employability skills are practiced and demonstrated. Learn more here at www.mtfccla.org or www.fcclainc.org.

Funding and Support

Montana CTE Funding

State of Montana CTE funding provides funding to support the FCS program. Examples of utilization of funds include:

- Purchasing equipment or supplies needed for teaching the content
- Teacher professional development
- Purchasing teaching resources
- Expenses not covered by Carl D. Perkins funding

Carl D. Perkins

Carl D. Perkins is a federal grant program that can provide access to funding for the following:

- FCS teacher training and professional development
- Equipment used with children
- Resources to support the learning centers
- Toys that align to the learning
- Student travel expenses (such as to and from FCCLA events) and/or training costs (such as Infant/Toddler CPR certification which is expected in both pathways)

OPI Support

OPI employs an FCS program specialist who is assigned to oversee and offer guidance and technical assistance to FCS programs, FCS teachers, and CTE pathways including early childhood-related pathway planning and implementation. OPI supports career and technical student organizations (specifically Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America) where industry knowledge, skills, and aptitudes/employability skills are practiced and demonstrated through industry-aligned competitions and rewarded through expanded scholarships and leadership opportunities. The FCS program specialist offers pathway training and Perkins/CTE updates to FCS teachers at no or low cost to the school.

FCS programs are eligible for CTE-specific grants and additional funding streams to support pathway work if the district employs a licensed FCS teacher and offers two minimum credits of courses meeting the Perkins requirements of 1 credit at the foundational level and 1 credit at the elective level within the Human Services or Education Program of Study. For more information related to pathways look to the menu bar for “FCS Pathways” on the [MT FCS Education Network Google Site](#).

For additional information please contact the Montana Office of Public Instruction.

Contact information:

Phone: 406-444-3680

Website: <http://opi.mt.gov/>

APPENDIX D

Child Care Needs Assessment Example

1. Do you have child(ren) enrolled in child care or do you plan to at any time in the next year? (Discontinue survey for any answer except Yes)

- Yes
- No
- Prefer to not answer

2. Do you have child(ren) in licensed or registered child care?

- Yes
- No
- I have child care, I'm not sure if it is licensed/registered

3. Do you mind sharing the name and location of the child care you use? (optional)

4. If you don't have child(ren) in licensed/registered child care, do your child(ren) attend unregulated child care such as a family member, friend, or unregulated provider (could be paid or unpaid)?

- Yes
- No
- N/A

5. How many child(ren) do you have in child care?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4 or more

6. How many hours per week do your child(ren) attend child care?

- Less than 20 hours
- 20 – 40 hours
- More than 40 hours

7. If you have school-age child(ren), do you utilize afterschool or summer care?

- Yes
- No

8. Is there a community need for after-school or summer care?

- Yes, Summer Care
- Yes, Afterschool Care
- No

9. Do you receive the Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship or Child Care Aware of America's military benefits for child care?

- Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship
- Child Care Aware of America Assistance
- No
- Not Sure

10. Which days of the week do you typically need care (check all that apply)?

- Monday
- Tuesday
- Wednesday
- Thursday
- Friday
- Saturday
- Sunday

11. What time of day is the earliest you need care to start? _____

12. What time of day is the latest you may need to pick up your child? _____

13. How many miles is your child care from your home or place of employment (whichever location was most important in making a child care decision)?

- Less than 2 miles
- 3 – 10 miles
- 11 – 20 miles
- 21 – 30 miles
- More than 30 miles

14. In the last 12 months, has child care influenced your employment (or your partner’s employment, if applicable) in any of the following ways? (check all that apply)

- Had to take unplanned vacation time/paid time off due to child care closures
- Had to take unplanned sick leave due to a child’s illness
- Had to reduce or change my work hours for more than just a few days
- Changed job roles for greater flexibility
- Changed work location for greater flexibility
- Lost wages due to child care closures
- For managers: Have had difficulty managing or hiring team members

15. Have you or someone in your immediate family considered staying home, rather than entering your child(ren) into a child care program?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer to not answer

16. Would having child care benefits make a position (here or somewhere else) more attractive to you as an employee?

- Yes
- No
- Not Sure

17. Would you be able and willing to work more days or longer hours for your employer if you had more child care options?

- Yes
- No
- Not Sure

18. If your employer did offer licensed/registered child care benefits such as a local partnership or onsite child care, what would be the most important factor for you in deciding whether to enroll your child(ren)? (Rank in order of importance, 1=most, 9=least)

- Hours of care available
- Cost of care
- Qualifications of staff
- Meals included
- I could spend more time with my child
- Program philosophy, curriculum, and/or approach to working with young children
- Learning environment and play spaces and materials (inside and outside)
- Reputation and/or references from other families who have enrolled in the program (if existing to child care only)
- Skills in caring for developmentally, physically, or emotionally challenged children
- Other (please specify): _____

19. Please share anything else you would like us to know about your child care needs and decisions you’ve made regarding selecting child care:

Note: This is an anonymous survey. However, if you would like to share your name and contact information, please do so below:

Name: _____ Phone: _____ Email: _____

APPENDIX E

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Outline

I. Introduction

- Parties involved in the MOU
- Purpose of the MOU
- Background information and context of the collaboration

II. Objectives

- Clearly stated objectives of the collaboration
- Specific goals and outcomes to be achieved
- Alignment with broader strategic goals or initiatives

III. Roles and Responsibilities

- Roles and responsibilities of each party involved in the collaboration
- Clear delineation of duties and expectations
- Outline of resources, expertise, or support each party will contribute

IV. Scope of Work

- Detailed description of the activities and tasks to be undertaken
- Timeline for completion of each task or milestone
- Any necessary coordination or communication protocols

V. Governance and Decision-Making

- Decision-making process for the collaboration
- Establishment of a steering committee, working group, or other governance structure
- Communication channels and frequency of report-outs or updates

VI. Resources and Funding

- Identification of resources, funding, or in-kind contributions from each party
- Agreed-upon financial or resource allocation for the collaboration
- Any specific terms or conditions related to funding or resource utilization

VII. Communication and Reporting

- Communication plan for regular updates, progress reports, or meetings
- Contact information for responsible parties from each organization
- Any necessary confidentiality or information-sharing protocols

VIII. Evaluation and Review

- Methods for evaluating the success and impact of the collaboration
- Scheduled review points for assessing progress and making any necessary adjustments
- Process for resolving conflicts or addressing issues that may arise

IX. Termination or Amendment

- Procedures for termination or amendment of the MOU, including notice periods
- Conditions under which the MOU may be terminated or modified by either party
- Any necessary procedures for transitioning or transferring responsibilities upon termination

X. Signatures and Effective Date

- Signatures of authorized representatives from each organization
- Date of execution of the MOU

Please note, this document is just an outline and should be tailored to the specific needs of the parties identified in your MOU. It is recommended to consult with your legal team(s) when drafting any binding documents.

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