



Department of Public Health and Human Services

Early Childhood and Family Support Division ♦ P.O. Box 4210 ♦ Helena, MT 59620-4210 ♦ Fax: 406-444-2750

Steve Bullock, Governor

Sheila Hogan, Director

July 24, 2020

Dear Child Care Director,

Montana continues to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic as it heads into a new school year. Each school district will be looking to meet the needs of its students while maintaining safety. This will result in a variety of non-traditional school schedules across the state. These schedules will greatly impact a parent's work schedule and affect their participation in the workforce. To help support families and the child care providers who serve them during these unpredictable times, the Early Childhood Services Bureau is making two temporary changes to the Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship effective August 1, 2020. At this time there is not an end date for these changes and future decisions will be based on the COVID-19 emergency declaration.

- 1) **The Best Beginnings Scholarship will pay 100% of monthly authorized amounts, regardless of a child's attendance.** As the pandemic continues, it may become necessary for children to miss extended periods of time in their child care program. It may also become necessary for a program to temporarily close their doors for a two-week quarantine due to COVID exposure. These absences and closures can have an impact on a child's continuity of care and on the income for a child care program. This change will help maintain continuity of care and minimize income fluctuation. In addition, if a program had to close due to COVID exposure in the month of July, Best Beginnings has emergency funding to pay for Best Beginnings Scholarship attendance during a two-week closure period. Contact your Child Care Resource and Referral Agency for assistance to invoice for this time period.
- 2) **The Best Beginnings Scholarship reimbursement rate for school-age children will now match the rates for preschool-age children.** With the upcoming school year and the variety of schedules it will bring with it, many families will be seeking child care for school-age children. To support programs in offering that care and families in obtaining it, the Best Beginnings Scholarship reimbursement rate for school-age children (those age 6 and older) will match the rates for preschool-age children (those ages 3 up to age 6).

For more information please see the reimbursement rate tables at <https://dphhs.mt.gov/hcsd/childcare/ecsproviders>.

Please note that these changes are in effect August 1, 2020 and will continue until further notice.

Thank you for continuing to do the critically important work of caring for our youngest Montanans. Please do not hesitate to reach out to the Early Childhood Services Bureau with any questions or comments.

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