Montana Early Childhood Account Board Minutes

Thursday October 29, 2026
11 a.m.
Zoom

WELCOME

- Call to Order
  - Meeting was called to order at 11:09 a.m. by Caitlin Jensen.
- Roll Call
  - DPHHS staff member Kathy Rich took roll.
  - Board Members Present
    - Lisa Malmquist
    - Crystal Armstrong
    - Mackenzie Espeland
    - Caitlin Jensen
    - Tracy Moseman
    - Kathy Deserly
    - Jewel Sullivan
    - Louisa Libertelli-Dunn
    - Tory Malek
  - Department Staff Present
    - Kathy Rich
    - Amber Tipton
    - Austin Waldbillig
- Review and approve Minute notes from September 17, 2026, board meeting
  - Torey Malek made a motion to approve September 17, 2026, minutes.
  - Kathy Deserly seconded the motion.
  - Unanimously approved by the Board.
  - Motion passed.

OVERVIEW OF APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED

- 347 total applications submitted; 67 progressed through internal approvals and were presented today.
- Austin Waldbillig presented preliminary data, including total funding requests across all three grant programs, total applications, and number of applications that have made it through internal review and ready for board approval. Austin noted that the data will change as Department staff continue to verify application requirements and request revisions from applications.

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- Several hundred applications remain under review—staff have been verifying UEIs and completing deeper reviews since Monday. Common reasons applications were not approved in the first batch: incomplete budget narratives, missing clarifications, or pending verification of licensing/UEIs; applicants will be asked to clarify and may resubmit. Staff reported ongoing review; additional approvals expected next week as UEIs and application verification continue.
- Austin Waldbillig reviewed and presented 67 applications that completed internal Level 1/Level 2 checks and requested board approval. The group included 32 centers, 33 groups, and 2 family programs, with roughly half of funding going to centers and half to groups (small share to family programs). Applications reviewed today came largely from early applicants (first week); some other early applications remain pending due to clarifications or validation needs. Funding breakdown for the approved batch: **$208,886** (Flexible Workforce Support), **$97,500** (Early Learning Development & Training), **$408,335.80** (Infant-Toddler Capacity Expansion). Total: **$714,721.80** from 67 applications to be approved today.

FLEXIBLE WORKFORCE SUPPORT GRANT

Funding Obligated, FY 27	Grant Funding Requested	Funds Remaining	Awards Ready for Board Approval
$3,000,000	$890,329.20	$2,109,670.80	$208,886.00

INFANT TODDLER CAPACITY EXPANSION GRANT

Funding Obligated	Grant Funding Requested	Funds Remaining	Awards Ready for Board Approval
$1,000,000	$1,580,489.97	$ (580,489.97)	$408,335.80

FLEXIBLE WORKFORCE SUPPORT GRANT

Funding Obligated	Grant Funding Requested	Funds Remaining	Awards Ready for Board Approval
$1,500,000	$401,279.97	$1,098,720.13	$97,500

APPLICATION DATA

Applications Submitted	Applications Ready for Board Approval	Percentage of Applications Ready for Board Approval
347	67	%19

AWARDS BY PROGRAM

Program Name	Program License Type	Flexible Workforce Support	Infant Toddler Capacity Expansion	Early Learning Development, Support, and Training	Total Award
Lil Rose Buds, LLC	Group	$2,710.00	$10,000.00	$1,500.00	$14,210.00
Christian Care	Group	$2,710.00	$10,000.00	$1,500.00	$14,210.00
Clark Fork School	Center	$3,835.00	$10,000.00	$2,500.00	$16,335.00
Mountain Peak Preschool	Group	$2,710.00	$0.00	$0.00	$2,710.00
Kidventures	Center	$3,835.00	$9,000.00	$2,500.00	$15,335.00
Jens Little Rugrats Inc	Center	$3,835.00	$10,000.00	$2,000.00	$15,835.00
Hazelnut Montessori Inc.	Group	$0.00	$10,000.00	$1,500.00	$11,500.00
Robyn's Nest Daycare	Center	$3,835.00	$10,000.00	$2,500.00	$16,335.00
Ash and Elm Playschool	Group	$0.00	$10,000.00	$1,500.00	$11,500.00
Kiddie Korner Daycare	Group	$2,710.00	$5,000.00	$1,500.00	$9,210.00
Glacier Peak Preschool	Center	$3,835.00	$0.00	$0.00	$3,835.00
Bambinis Playschool	Group	$2,710.00	$10,000.00	$1,500.00	$14,210.00
Little Raindrops Childcare LLC	Family	$2,445.00	$10,000.00	$1,500.00	$13,945.00
The Children's Center	Center	$3,835.00	$9,916.00	$2,000.00	$15,751.00
Play N Learn Academy	Center	$3,835.00	$10,000.00	$2,500.00	$16,335.00
Ms. Bee's Daycare	Group	$2,710.00	$10,000.00	$1,500.00	$14,210.00
Whitefish Community School	Group	$2,710.00	$0.00	$1,500.00	$4,210.00
Play N Learn Academy (Play N Learn Preschool)	Center	$3,835.00	$0.00	$2,000.00	$5,835.00
Ascent Early Education Center	Group	$2,710.00	$2,500.00	$1,500.00	$6,710.00
Merry Bees, LLC	Group	$2,710.00	$500.00	$0.00	$3,210.00
Miss Kiddy's corral Day Care	Group	$2,700.00	$7,000.00	$0.00	$9,700.00
Little Sprouts Childcare and Preschool	Center	$3,835.00	$10,000.00	$2,500.00	$16,335.00
Sunflower Academy Childcare	Center	$3,835.00	$10,000.00	$2,500.00	$16,335.00
Montessori Plus International	Center	$3,835.00	$10,000.00	$2,000.00	$15,835.00

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Whitefish Community School	Group	$2,710.00	$5,000.00	$1,500.00	$9,210.00
Sunflower Academy Sidekicks infant care only	Group	$2,710.00	$10,000.00	$1,500.00	$14,210.00
Tiger Cubs Daycare	Group	$2,710.00	$4,000.00	$0.00	$6,710.00
Gateway to Early Learning, Inc	Center	$3,835.00	$4,765.44	$2,000.00	$10,600.44
The Wonder Years Daycare & Preschool LLC	Center	$3,835.00	$10,000.00	$2,000.00	$15,835.00
WonderLab Infant / Toddler Expansion	Center	$3,835.00	$10,000.00	$0.00	$13,835.00
Crystal's Infant-Toddler Program	Group	$2,710.00	$10,000.00	$1,500.00	$14,210.00
Flathead Childcare	Group	$2,710.00	$10,000.00	$1,500.00	$14,210.00
Origins Sr Preschool	Group	$2,708.00	$10,000.00	$1,500.00	$14,208.00
The Magic Forest Childcare and Preschool	Group	$2,710.00	$0.00	$0.00	$2,710.00
Jr Preschool	Group	$2,708.00	$10,000.00	$1,500.00	$14,208.00
Geyser Day Care	Group	$2,710.00	$5,511.59	$1,500.00	$9,721.59
Time 4 Kidz Bozeman	Group	$2,700.00	$10,000.00	$1,500.00	$14,200.00
Boys and Girls Club of Missoula - Bonner	Center	$3,835.00	$0.00	$0.00	$3,835.00
Hellgate Boys Girls Club	Center	$3,835.00	$0.00	$0.00	$3,835.00
Lolo Elementary Boys Girls Club	Center	$3,835.00	$0.00	$0.00	$3,835.00
Target Range Boys Girls Club	Center	$3,835.00	$0.00	$0.00	$3,835.00
Mid Town Boys Girls Club	Center	$3,835.00	$0.00	$0.00	$3,835.00
Little Rascals Daycare	Group	$2,710.00	$8,151.00	$1,500.00	$12,361.00
Little Rascals Daycare Location 2	Group	$2,710.00	$5,023.98	$1,500.00	$9,233.98
Bright Minds at Flathead Childcare	Group	$2,710.00	$10,000.00	$1,500.00	$14,210.00
Flathead Childcare Columbia Falls	Group	$2,710.00	$9,700.00	$1,500.00	$13,910.00
Shepherd Sprouts	Group	$2,710.00	$8,800.00	$1,500.00	$13,010.00
Hodges Child Development Corporation DBA Kid Kountry CDC	Center	$3,835.00	$10,000.00	$2,500.00	$16,335.00

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Small Wonder Child Care Inc	Center	$3,835.00	$0.00	$2,500.00	$6,335.00
Lockwood Daycare	Family	$2,445.00	$10,000.00	$1,500.00	$13,945.00
After the Bell	Center	$3,835.00	$0.00	$1,500.00	$5,335.00
The Cub House LLC	Group		$9,317.79	$0.00	$9,317.79
University on Princeton	Group	$2,710.00	$0.00	$1,500.00	$4,210.00
Kidz Konnection	Center	$3,835.00	$0.00	$2,000.00	$5,835.00
Young Explorers	Center	$3,835.00	$0.00	$2,000.00	$5,835.00
Little Antlers Childcare	Group	$2,710.00	$9,150.00	$1,500.00	$13,360.00
Gibson Grove Preschool and Childcare 2.0	Group	$2,710.00	$5,000.00	$0.00	$7,710.00
Munchkin Land Childcare LLC	Group	$2,710.00	$0.00	$1,500.00	$4,210.00
Pete's Place Child Care Center	Center	$3,835.00	$0.00	$3,000.00	$6,835.00
Lolo Preschool and Childcare	Center	$3,835.00	$0.00	$2,000.00	$5,835.00
Rising Stars Early Learning	Center	$3,835.00	$0.00	$2,500.00	$6,335.00
Green Beans	Group	$2,710.00	$10,000.00	$1,500.00	$14,210.00
The Growing Tree	Center	$3,835.00	$10,000.00	$2,000.00	$15,835.00
Firefly Children's Center	Center	$3,835.00	$0.00	$2,000.00	$5,835.00
Small World Daycare and Preschool LLC	Center	$3,835.00	$10,000.00	$2,000.00	$15,835.00
Bozeman Montessori	Center	$3,835.00	$10,000.00	$2,000.00	$15,835.00
Bozeman Montessori	Center	$3,835.00	$10,000.00	$2,500.00	$16,335.00
Total		$208,886.00	$408,335.80	$97,500.00	$714,721.80

BOARD DISCUSSION

The Board discussed geographical representation information being accessible for the next meeting to understand the scope of reach from these grants. Austin clarified that no applications at this time have been denied, all applications that have been processed and not ready to approve today have information requests sent back to providers. Out of the 347 total applications only 67 are ready to approve today due to the two business days staff have had to process since the closing of applications on Monday October 26, 2026, at 11:59pm. In reviewing the current application batch there will be the same

business names seen more than once but each application is submitted utilizing a different provider number.

PUBLIC COMMENTS AND VOTES

PUBLIC COMMENT

- Public Comment
  - Two members of the public made comment.

VOTES

- Vote to approve internally verified and complete applications prepared to review today.
  - Torey Malek made a motion to approve 67 applications.
  - Kathy Deserley seconded the motion.
  - Unanimously approved by the Board.
  - Motion passed.

REQUEST TO REALLOACTE OBLIGATED FUNDS

- Austin Waldbillig requested permission to reallocate up to **$1 million** from Early Learning Development & Support to Infant-Toddler Capacity Expansion to avoid turning down infant-toddler applicants. Staff analysis indicated infant-toddler demand will exceed its allocation by **$800k**–**$900k**, while early learning shows a shortfall of about **$1.0M**–**$1.05M** relative to original allocation.

BOARD DISCUSSION

The Board discussed legal allowability, administrative timeline, and remaining unallocated funds; concerns included avoiding multiple reallocations. How to account for any unused funds from this application cycle, if there would be a second application period in this FY ensuring sufficient runway for contracting and FY yearend payments. The board discussed tabling the reallocation decision, pending further review of additional application verifications and more complete data; staff will present updated numbers at the next meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENTS AND VOTES

PUBLIC COMMENT

- Public Comment
  - Four members of the public made comment.

VOTES

- The board addressed the reallocation decision pending further review of additional application verifications and more complete data.

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- Crystal Armstrong Motions to table the reallocation decision.
- Mackenzie Espeland seconded this Motion.
- Unanimously approved by the board.
- Motion passed.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- Public Comment
  - One member of the public made comment.

ADJOURNMENT

- Vote to adjourn.
- Additional application reviews will continue; the board will reconvene (proposed for next Thursday).
  - Mackenzie Espeland motions to adjourn.
  - Louisa Libertelli-Dunn seconds the motion.
  - Unanimously approved by the Board.
  - Motion passes.
  - Meeting adjourned at 11:48 a.m.

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