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The Missoula Community School and its Board of Director's Supports Early Edge PreK.

With 13 years of experience providing high quality and dependable early childhood education, the Missoula Community School and the families it serves appreciate Governor Bullock's commitment to funding early childhood education. High quality preschool makes a big difference in children's lives. However, the high cost of preschool is a barrier to many families; one that makes it extremely challenging for families with young children to make ends meet. Reducing the cost of preschool would allow all Montana families the opportunity to realize the benefits of high quality early childhood education. Our school has the privilege of being served by a board dedicated to providing quality early childhood to as many families as possible in Missoula. This year, 15% of our families are on a scholarship provided by the school. These are families that do not qualify for Best Beginnings, but have been determined by a third party to be unable to meet the costs of quality early childhood. At least half of those families qualified for our maximum allowed amount. These are families that could not afford a quality program independently. We acknowledge, also, that for families with more than one preschool age child, regardless of tuition assistance, the cost of quality care can be equal to if not more than a second mortgage.

We are eager to collaborate with the public schools. There is a quantitative difference between a child who has had a quality preschool experience and one that has not. It is time for us to work together and make a powerful difference and change in all of our community's future. We need to mind the gap between early childhood elementary school, in an effort to jointly provide our children with the opportunities they need and deserve.

We at MCS do not fear a future in which this funding passes. There will be change and adaptations, but positive changes and adaptations. It will be similar to when Missoula chose to offer full day Kindergarten, a population our school served with success. Our demographic changed, and change naturally brought nervousness. But the purpose and outcome were undeniably important and benefited so greater of an audience than we, as a single school, could serve. We adapted, and found a niche in the population that was underserved.

In the end, this proposal is going to help so many families that cannot otherwise offer their children quality care. The needs of the families MCS serves will not change; they will still need full day preschool, and for many full time preschool. Our experience has also told us families want choices in their preschool options; different parents prefer different approaches. Families are going to feel forever grateful when this proposal passes. They will also be thankful for collaboration and options that include those professionals who have held their hand along the way up until now.

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