



Mary Fallin
Office of the Governor
State of Oklahoma

March 16, 2017

The Honorable Members of the Montana Legislature
PO Box 201706
Helena, MT 59620

Dear Members:

As the Governor of the State of Oklahoma, I write to discuss the successes of early childhood programs in my state. In the Sooner State, early childhood education is not a Republican or a Democrat initiative: it is an Oklahoma Initiative. I am very proud of the work my state has done to provide 4-year-olds with access to early learning programs.

Oklahoma has a long history of supporting early childhood education. Ten districts participated in the first pre-kindergarten pilot program that was launched in 1980. In 1993, SB 183 authorized school districts to offer Pre-K child development programs. In 1998, HB 1657 provided that all Oklahoma children who turned 4 on or before September 1 would be entitled to attend half-day or full-day Pre-K with funding supplied as part of the State Aid Formula. Pre-K is not a mandatory grade, and participation in a program is voluntary.

Our programs are successful, in part, because of partnerships with our outstanding foundations and businesses. Through their generous support, we have been able to implement national models such as Educare, many successful locally-developed early learning and literacy programs, and nearly all of our school districts offer pre-K classes. Since 2003, a public-private partnership known as the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness, has aided in the coordination and support of these early childhood programs to increase school readiness. I would encourage you to consider creative partnerships as you move throughout this process in Montana. As elected officials, a variety of priorities compete for budget allocations, and I know it is difficult to find funding for new programs, especially in tight budget years.

Each of us wants our future generations to be more prosperous and successful than our generation. For this reason, your efforts on behalf of your state's youngest children are so important. And you are making a difference in Montana. As each of you considers the difficult budget decisions ahead, I hope you will consider the impact pre-kindergarten education has on school readiness, particularly for the most vulnerable children. These programs change young lives and improve the trajectory of families.

Attached to this letter, you will find the 2017 Legislative Briefing on the Pre-Kindergarten Program prepared by the Oklahoma State Department of Education. I applaud your willingness to have this important conversation as a state. I know you are improving Montana's educational system and making a difference in the lives of children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Fallin".

Mary Fallin
Governor