

THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA
INSTITUTE for EARLY
CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

RESEARCH • DEMONSTRATION • OUTREACH

Promoting high-quality early learning opportunities for all children, birth - 3rd grade, through research, demonstration, and community outreach across Montana and our greater region.



4th Annual Early Childhood Summit Impact Report



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The Early Childhood Summit *in review*

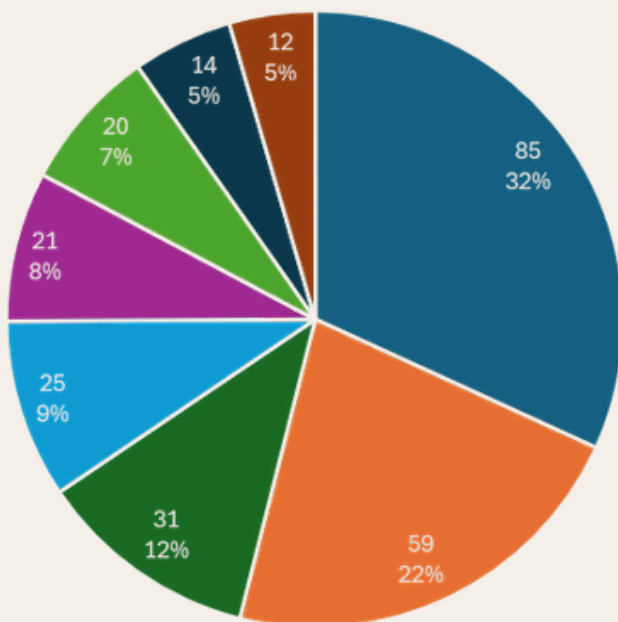


Building Blocks for a Strong Start: Early Years. Early Grades. One Connected Story. We understand that a child's story is a connected story. Built over time, across relationships and experiences, and shaped by the collective efforts of all of us. We create continuity. We create connection. We create possibility. This year's 4th Annual Early Childhood Education Summit on April 16-18, 2026, brought together over **250 early childhood professionals** representing **28% of Montana counties**. With **more than 40 professional development sessions**.

Representation by the Numbers



Professional Role Distribution



- Teacher
- Administrator (principal, district professional)
- Professor
- Instructional Coach
- Other
- Support staff
- Presenter/Panelist
- Student

267 participants



25,442

Round trip miles collectively traveled by attendees from across Montana



The Early Childhood Summit in review



Representation by the Numbers

30+ Family, friends, and team members
present to celebrate and honor award winners

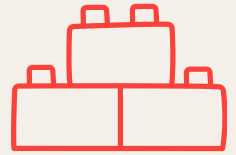


66%

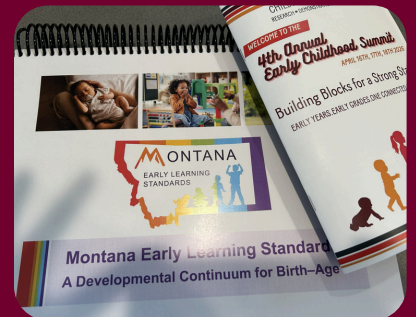
More Professional Development
sessions over last year

The Early Childhood Summit

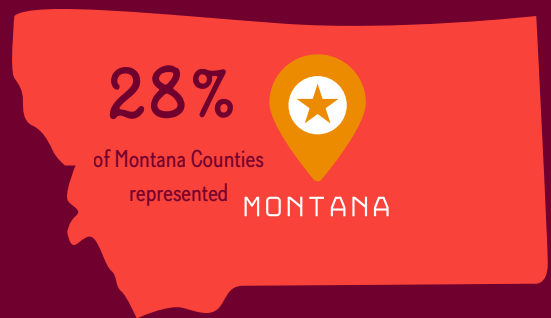
highlights



- **Spotlight on Joyful Literacy in Action:** The Summit was honored to host **First Lady Susan Gianforte**, who shared the Dolly Parton Imagination Library's research on the impact of shared book reading worldwide and how she is growing the program here in Montana. Panel host, Dr. Kate Brayko, received great reviews on her Literacy Landscape session focused on bringing the science of reading outside to play with our featured story walk, What We'll Build by Oliver Jeffers.
- **Expanded Professional Development:** An overwhelming response to our call for proposals resulted in an offering of more than 40 professional development sessions over two days! Participants enjoyed presentations on a wide range of topics including employee recruitment and retention, advocacy, inclusivity, number sense, project-based learning, positive education practices, AI for teachers, IEFA for early learners, community school partnerships, and intentional conversations to build early language and literacy.
- **Keynote and Workshop:** Attendees were inspired by Dr. Jennifer Zosh's keynote and interactive workshop where participants used a pedagogical pivot from an existing lesson plan to use a toolkit of strategies to move their practice toward Guided Play.
- **Montana Early Learning Standards (MELS) – Big Changes, Stronger Standards:** A panel of statewide subject matter experts delivered a session highlighting the comprehensive update of the MELS. The new version strengthens Montana's birth-to-grade 3 learning system by building overlapping developmental age bands that result in a unified early learning pathway for Montana's children.



"Hands on, super fun, and engaging! Kassie was so enthusiastic, I would have hung out in the Tiny Toy Tales session all day long!"



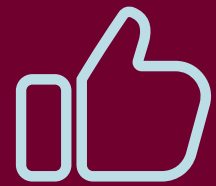
"Every year, my favorite part of the Summit is to visit the LAB Preschool. The teachers are amazing and the evidence is right in front of our eyes!"



"Literacy Landscapes was my favorite session of the day – it made me excited to come in on Monday morning and try out new things!"



"The quality of presenters and presentations was exceptional. I learned many new things that I will take back to my building and implement."



"Amazing sessions, excellent networking – I learned a lot!"



"The MELS revision and the way it was laced with purpose, intention, and organically throughout the sessions."



We would like to thank all our sponsors and partners for their generous support



Acknowledgements

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Haring Center for Inclusive Education

Early Childhood Project Based Learning

SPARK! Arts

Montana Health Care Foundation

Missoula County Public Schools

Zero to Five Montana

Office of Public Instruction

Montana DPHHS

Institute for Educational Leadership

We hope to see you next year!