

## Why Missoula is Concerned about Young Children and Their Families

Early childhood is important because so much brain development occurs.

- 90% of brain growth occurs during the first 3 years.
- At age three, the brain starts to “prune” the connections between nerve cells, keeping those connections that are used and deleting those that are not used.

### Social-Emotional Development:

- Babies learn a sense of self through their first relationships with caregivers, which can be either positive or negative depending on the care they receive.
- If babies develop a close and secure relationship with an adult—something called “secure attachment”—they have better self-esteem, better relationships with others, and are more resilient to family stress.
- If babies do not develop a secure attachment, they are much more likely to develop behavioral and emotional problems later in life, such as antisocial behavior, anxiety disorders, and difficulty regulating emotions.

### Intellectual Development:

- The foundations for success in school are laid in early childhood through many experiences with language and word play, books, and opportunities for “writing.”
- The child who starts school behind, lags behind—our educational system is not the great equalizer.
- Major risk factors for school failure include race and socioeconomic status.

### Physical Development:

- Physical health begins before birth. There are long-term effects on the fetus if the mother uses alcohol, tobacco, or drugs.
- Important factors in early physical development include good nutrition, adequate physical activity, and immunizations against disease.
- There are many advantages to breastfeeding. For example, breastfed babies are more likely to have a higher IQ and less likely to become obese.

### Investing in early childhood saves society money:

- Quality preschool makes a difference! Longitudinal studies show that the positive effects from preschool last through high school and into adult life. The positive effects include that children who have gone to quality preschools are less likely to abuse drugs, to exhibit delinquent behaviors, or to have unplanned pregnancies. They have higher self-esteem, greater social and emotional maturity, better attitudes toward school, higher academic motivation, better grades, a higher rate of graduation, and higher future aspirations.
- Later in life, children who have attended quality preschool are more likely to be employed and have higher earnings, experience better interpersonal relationships, and have fewer arrests and antisocial acts.
- Each dollar invested in quality early childhood programs for at-risk families results in a long-term payoff to society of about 12% (when adjusted for inflation).