



STARS Preschool Criteria

Who is eligible?

- Public Schools. Kindergarten I programs are ineligible. Existing preschool programs, including special education-funded programs and classrooms may be expanded, but funds cannot be used to supplant special education funding.
- Any Best Beginnings STARS to Quality Program at 3 STARS or higher and with dedicated preschool classrooms or services for 4 year olds. Program must maintain compliance with STARS level 3 or higher as well. Child Care Programs who would like to apply for STARS Preschool and who are not currently enrolled in the Best Beginnings STARS to Quality Program, can demonstrate that they meet STAR 3 and lower criteria and enroll in Best Beginnings STARS to Quality simultaneously, but must follow rules of both programs.
- Head Start Programs (funds could be used to expand but cannot be used to supplant existing federal funding)
- Private preschool providers and schools
- Community Based programs
- Military Programs
- Tribal Programs / Classrooms
- Montana Preschool Development Grant classrooms are ineligible

Pursuant to Article X of the Montana Constitution, sectarian (faith-based) programs are not eligible for funding.

All programs must meet applicable STARS preschool health and safety standards

Grant Awards:

- MT DPHHS award high quality STARS Preschool programs through a competitive application process. Grants will be renewable for up to 2 years.

Awarding of contracts:

- Contracts will be awarded to STARS Preschool providers through a competitive application process, subject to funding availability and identified regional need. Contracts are renewable annually up to 2 years.

Selection:

- Selection will take into account the applicant's ability to demonstrate, in their application, the most effective implementation of a STARS Preschool classroom. The criteria for selection will include:
 - Contracts will receive higher priority points in the competitive process for serving children identified as high needs.
 - The quality of the proposed programs as indicated by adherence to the Program Guidelines and Quality Assurances
 - The qualifications and experience of the applicant and staff in planning, organizing and providing comprehensive child development services to families and children at the community level
 - The program design and suitability of facilities and equipment proposed to be used in carrying out the program
 - Cost effectiveness of the proposed program
 - The need for preschool services in the community served by the applicant
- Selection will also take into account a balance of delivery models and locations, including a mix of both rural and urban programs

Budgets:

- The maximum amount of funding available is \$150,000 per classroom per school year.
- Budget templates will be used for completion of the budget.
- The budget may be approved/adjusted by the State based on the delivery model and on the projected number of children served.
- The State also reserves the right to track expenditures over time and if programs are not able to expend the full award amount, the state may re-allocate expenditures.
- Administration and Indirect's are capped at 5%.
- A quarterly statement of expenditures shall be submitted to the State.

Disbursement of Funds:

- Funds to STARS Preschool Programs will be disbursed quarterly, subject to the availability of funds and on receipt of completed required paperwork. Start-up funds can be requested in the form of an advance.
- Funds will be released in accord with the program's budget with quarterly installments.
- Any unspent funds will be returned at the end of each year.

Budget guidelines:

- Grant funds cannot supplant existing state, federal, or local funds to provide similar services, but can be used to supplement or expand.
- The budget template provides line item categories with descriptions for each line item.
- The state will be providing coaching support 1-2 times per month for each classroom. If programs would like to purchase additional coaching support from coaches directly, an estimated cost for the year is \$4000.
- As budgets are developed, [the following white paper](#), may be helpful when developing amounts for personnel.
 Bullard, J., & Hancock, L. (2017, May). *Compensation, Turnover, and Quality*
- Often new classrooms allocate considerable funding to materials that are developmentally appropriate. [Please refer to the following webpage for vendors that may offer discounts.](#)
- Programs will need to budget for travel and per diem to send staff to annual meetings in Helena.

Match Requirements:

- A match requirement will be required in the amount of 10% of the total grant annually. This can be in kind, cash but cannot be other federal or state funds. Examples may include:
 - Facility space including classroom space and shared space
 - Wrap around or extended day tuition
 - Tuition for non-eligible children, i.e. 3 year olds
 - Equipment
 - Other county or district funding not already excluded
 - Cash
 - Support Services that may be used by the STARS Preschool classroom such as custodian, accountant, etc.
 - Volunteer Services and time
 - Donations of supplies, land, or equipment

Parent Fees:

- Grant funds should be used to pay for preschool education during school hours. Grant funds cannot supplant other sources of funding with the exception of parent fees. Private programs can assess wrap around service fees (outside of the school day).

Early Learning Standards:

- All staff must have access to and show alignment with the Montana Early Learning Standards (MELS)

Teacher Degree:

- For public schools, lead teacher will be licensed and endorsed in accord with the State of Montana's teacher licensure standards and [Title 10 Chapter 63 public preschool program standards.](#)
- For non-public school settings, Lead teacher must be equivalent to a Level 6 on the Montana Early Care and Education Practitioner Registry (Bachelor's degree with 20 credits in early childhood education).

- Programs may apply for a waiver from this requirement if the Lead teacher has lesser credentials, but has extensive experience and is supervised by a Level 6, a certified teacher, or higher, especially related to curriculum and content development. In order to receive a waiver, applicants will include a plan and the budget will reflect support for the Lead teacher to work toward meeting this requirement. If the applicant does not have an existing relationship with a Level 6 or certified teacher, the state, through the Early Childhood Project, will assist in matching a qualified supervising individual. The supervisor may be remote (please provide justification).

Auxiliary Teacher:

- Must have 2 years of study at higher education, or associates degree in related field. Specific Early Childhood Education knowledge and experience is prioritized.

Ongoing Specialized Training:

- Lead Teacher and Auxiliary Teacher must achieve a minimum of 24 hours annually of continuing education in an approved early childhood education career path or P-3 endorsement after the first year.
- Must be trained in the pyramid model within the first 6 months of implementation (online self-paced modules).
- Must attend training in ASQ SE, the DIAL, and Environment Rating Scales within the first 2 months of implementation.
- All staff must complete Mandatory Reporting training within 30 days of hire.
- Staff will attend all required trainings and meetings.

Substitutes:

- Teacher and child ratios need to remain even if a teacher is absent.

Class Size:

- The maximum class size is 18.
- A waiver could be applied for to serve over 18 children, up to 20 and to serve less than 18 children with rationale.

Staff Child Ratio:

- Ratio is 1 adult to every 10 children (1:10), with lead teacher and aide/paraprofessional for any additional students over 10 up to 18.

Enrollment:

- Children enrolled in STARS Preschool must turn 4 by September 10 of each respective year (September 10, 2017 for 2017/2018 school year, and September 10, 2018 for 2018/2019 school year)
- Programs could provide a mixed age group classroom but can only receive STARS Preschool funds for 4 year olds, could charge tuition or use other blended funding for 3 year olds. **This would need to be demonstrated in the budget in the match column and other application documents.**

- While not required, programs are encouraged to prioritize at least 25% of classroom slots to children who are high needs (including but not limited to):
 - Children who are low income
 - Children receiving services from Part B or Part C
 - Children who are engaged in mental health services and supports
 - Children who are enrolled Tribal Members
 - Children who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless

Health and Developmental Screening/Referral Services:

- Programs must offer screenings or at a minimum connect parents and children through referral for screenings and support
- Parents agree to complete the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ-SE) developmental screener
- Immunization requirements are met

Comprehensive Curriculum:

- Classrooms must use a research based curriculum. This curriculum must address all the domains of learning and align with the Montana Early Learning Standards as well as Developmentally Appropriate Practice.

Instruction Time and Number of Days:

- STARS Preschool classrooms shall provide a minimum of 5.5 hours per day, or 28 hours per week.
- Transportation time cannot be included in the classroom hours per day.
- A waiver can be applied for if demonstrated alternative solution for rural communities.
- Wrap around services are not required.

Learning Environment:

- STARS Preschool Programs are expected to provide a learning environment which is at minimum clean, safe, and conducive to high quality learning.
- Programs will take training on Environment Rating Scales (ERS), and will design the learning environment with ERS standards in mind.
- Programs will be assessed twice a year (initial baseline and once more) in ERS.

Space:

- Each classroom shall have space for 18 children, unless waived, which includes a minimum of 35 square feet per child of indoor classroom space, and 75 square feet per child of outdoor play space.
- Outdoor space must be in accord with STARS Preschool Health and Safety Standards

Classroom Equipment, Materials, and Supplies:

- Each classroom is expected to provide developmentally appropriate furnishings, decorations, materials, manipulatives, and activities that align with Environment Rating Scales and the Montana Early Learning Standards.

Parent Involvement:

- The program provides families with multiple opportunities to be involved.
- The program offers, in addition to ongoing conversations, a parent teacher conference at least two times in the school year (a home visit can substitute for one parent teacher conference)

Community Collaboration:

- Each program will participate in local Best Beginnings Coalitions if there is one located in the community
- Each program will collaborate with community partners to be able to support and refer children and/or programs for additional resources.

Attendance:

- Daily attendance records should be maintained on site and include the dates when a child is present, absent, and if the child arrives late or leaves early.

Documentation requirements (at a minimum, additional data collection may be required once program begins):

- Programs are expected to complete, submit, and/or file all documents required by the STARS Preschool Program (this may be required online, via paper, or email)
- Enrollment and attendance data quarterly
- Copies of all documents and records shall be kept on file for 7 years.
- Parents agree to assessments and demographic surveys.
- Quarterly reports including program required data and reconciliation to budget and actual cost of program delivery.

Health and Safety Standards:

- Programs are expected to meet the [health and safety standards for STARS Preschool](#) by the end of the first year

Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Requirements:

- All staff in program are mandatory reporters. All staff must complete mandatory reporting training within 30 days of hire. Any suspected abuse or neglect as well as any significant accidents must be reported to applicable licensing authority.

Mandatory reporting:

- The director, assistant director or any staff member of the preschool facility who has reason to suspect that any student is or has been abused or neglected is required to personally report the matter promptly to the department abuse hotline at 1 (866) 820-5437. The preschool Teacher or staff member shall make the report within 24 hours of receiving information concerning suspected student abuse or neglect.

Discipline:

- Discipline policies must align with a positive child guidance approach that supports a child's social-emotional wellbeing.

Monitoring:

- Site visits and monitoring will be provided by State of Montana monitors to ensure quality and compliance. Assessments are administered to ensure the program is meeting children's needs and high quality standards including, but not limited to the ERS and health and safety inspections.

Compliance:

- If programs are found to be non-compliant from a desk audit, validated complaints, or as a result of a monitoring visit, assurances and corrective action plans must be provided to MT DPHHS that the program will address the concerns. Actions may be followed up on through additional monitoring and oversight.

Supports for success:

- At least quarterly monitoring and ERS (2x year)
- Professional development and technical assistance specific to the DIAL, ASQ/ASQ-SE, Environment Rating Scales, the Pyramid Model.
- Coaching support 1-2 times a month (if programs want more, they should budget for additional coaching support)
- Annual grantee meetings
- Ongoing professional development opportunities
- Resources and publications designed to support the success of the program