



February 1, 2026

Important Updates: New Best Beginnings Scholarship Provider Portal

The Best Beginnings Scholarship (BBS) is launching an enhanced online platform that allows child care providers to manage all aspects of the scholarship. Accessed through Okta, the State of Montana's secure login system, this new portal replaces many paper-based processes, reducing wait times and enabling direct communication with BBS staff.

Portal Features and Benefits

The Provider Portal provides a safe and easy way to manage your scholarship cases. Key features include:

- **Administrative Management:** Manage EFT and W-9 forms and complete Provider Rights and Responsibilities.
- **Reporting:** Report private pay rates, registration fees, and family copayments.
- **Enrollment & Attendance:** Ability to see child(ren) authorized for child care and report weekly or monthly attendance.
- **Communication:** Submit payment resolution requests and send or receive secure messages and notifications.

Reporting Rates and Fees

- **Initial Setup:** No existing private pay or registration rates will be migrated from the old system; you must report these when you first log in if you charge private pay families a part-time or full-time monthly rate and/or registration fee. Reported rates are effective the first day of the month after they are reported.
- **Slot Types:** Rates must be reported as part-time or full-time monthly slots based on scholarship age groups (infant/toddler, preschool, and school-age).
- **Rate Requirements:** Reported rates take effect on the first day of the following month.
- **Reimbursement:** The scholarship pays the lower of your reported rate or the statewide reimbursement rate.

Child Enrollment and Case Transitions

- **Authorization Moves:** A child's current hours and providers will be moved to the new Part-Time (less than 25 hours per week) or Full-Time (over 25 hours per week) care slots.
- **Policy Changes:** New policies will apply when a parent or guardian renews a case or changes their child's need for care.

- Non-school-age children can be approved for either part-time or full-time care.
- School-age children are approved for part-time care during the school year.
 - Full-time care may be approved if the child has verified special health needs or if the parent/guardian works non-traditional hours.
 - During the summer, parents or guardians can choose either part-time or full-time care for school-age children.

Attendance Reporting and Payments

- **Digital Submission:** Attendance must be reported through the portal; paper forms are no longer accepted. Attendance must match actual arrival and departure times rounded to the nearest 15 minutes.
- **Reporting Deadlines:** Attendance and copayment status must be reported within 60 days after the service month; payments will not be made if attendance is submitted late.
- **Dispute Resolution:** Parents have seven calendar days to review and dispute submitted attendance. If a dispute is raised, the provider has an opportunity to revise attendance. Providers are responsible for working with families to resolve these issues, though the Department may intervene if necessary. Please note: *Disputes will delay payment; however, this is an important program integrity feature that allows for a timely notice to both a provider and parent/guardian when there is a disagreement.*
- **Payment Schedule:** Payments run once per week and are issued after services are completed and attendance is submitted. Direct deposit (EFT) is available for faster payments.

2026 Transition Payment Timeline

- **January 2026:** Submit invoices by 2/4/2025 to ensure timely payment. After this date, attendance must be entered into the new Provider Portal.
- **February 2026:** Attendance for February can be entered starting 2/9/2025, but the full month's attendance cannot be submitted until March 1, 2026. *Even though MAQCS is live mid-month, the entire month will be available for submission.*
- **March 2026:** Attendance for March cannot be submitted until April 1, 2026.

Next Steps

- **Access Okta:** Look for instructions to create your account and enable your Provider Portal credentials. Instructions will be mailed and emailed to your address on file.
- **Review Rights:** Sign off on the updated Provider Rights and Responsibilities.
- **Prepare Documents:** Have digital copies of any required forms (like W-9 or EFT) ready for upload.

Questions?

- Scholarship Features: Contact your local Child Care Agency.
- Licensing Features: Contact Spark Montana.
- General Information: Visit the Child Care Bureau website at <https://dphhs.mt.gov/ecfsd/childcare>.

For more information:

Child Care Bureau, Website:

<https://dphhs.mt.gov/ecfsd/childcare>

Child Care Agencies, Website:

<https://dphhs.mt.gov/ecfsd/childcare/childcareresourceandreferral>

Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) Service Provider Locator Website:

<https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/ecc6837721384b2a8a2b8123c422589a>

MAQCS Contact Website:

DPHHS.MT.GOV/ECFSD/MAQCS/Contacts