



Montana Early Literacy and Numeracy Advisory Council

Recommendations to the Montana Board of Public Education

September 12, 2025

Introduction and Summary

The first five years of life represent the most critical period of brain development, underscoring the foundational role of early learning in shaping long-term academic achievement, career outcomes, and overall well-being.

Decades of research in comprehensive early education models, inclusive of high-quality early literacy and numeracy interventions, are among the strongest predictors of third grade reading proficiency, a benchmark closely correlated with high school graduation, postsecondary attainment, and workforce readiness. Disparities in access to quality early learning mean some children enter kindergarten up to two years behind their peers, further demonstrating the importance of developmentally appropriate early interventions in reducing these gaps. In recent years, Montana has passed targeted early learning legislation to address lagging 3rd grade proficiency scores.

In 2023, Representative Brad Barker (HD 55) sponsored [HB 352](#) to provide targeted interventions to support 3rd grade reading proficiency. The bill established duties of the Board of Public Education to identify an evaluation methodology to determine whether the child is above, at, or below a developmental trajectory leading to reading proficiency upon completion of 3rd grade. The Board of Public Education was also required to choose a home-based early literacy program and design a framework for jumpstart programs for early literacy targeted interventions in schools. The bill was signed by the Governor on May 18, 2023, and went into effect July 1, 2023. The Board of Public Education created the [Montana Early Literacy Advisory Council](#) on September 14, 2023 to provide recommendations to the Board of Public Education on the requirements in HB 352 to provide targeted interventions to support 3rd grade reading proficiency.

Building upon this foundation, in 2025, Representative Melissa Romano (HD 80) sponsored [HB 338](#) to provide targeted interventions to support 3rd grade numeracy proficiency. The bill established duties of the Board of Public Education to identify an evaluation methodology to determine whether the child is above, at, or below a developmental trajectory leading to numeracy proficiency upon completion of 3rd grade. It also allowed for enrollment and program screening year-round. The bill was signed by the Governor on May 5, 2025, and went into effect July 1, 2025. To meet these new requirements, the Board of Public Education reauthorized the Early Literacy Advisory Council as the [Early Literacy and Numeracy Advisory Council](#). The Advisory Council met for the first time on June 2, 2025 to provide recommendations to the Board of Public Education on implementing HB 338 to provide targeted interventions to support 3rd grade math proficiency.

Members of the Advisory Council are as follows:

- ❖ Dr. Norah Barney: Director of Special Education and Curriculum, Anaconda Public Schools
- ❖ Dr. Laurie Barron: Superintendent, Evergreen School District
- ❖ Dr. Anne Penn Cox: Director of Student Services and Early Learning Coordinator, Livingston Public Schools
- ❖ Karen Filipovich: Executive Director, Montana Head Start Association

- ❖ Colette Getten: Former Early Learning Family Center Administrator, Great Falls Public Schools
- ❖ Marisa Graybill: Founder of MG Education Innovations
- ❖ Marie Judisch: Senior Manager of Academic Outcomes and Instruction, Office of Public Instruction
- ❖ Dr. Christine Lux: Professor of Early Childhood Education, Montana State University
- ❖ Lance Melton: Executive Director, Montana School Boards Association
- ❖ Melissa Nikolakakos: Montana Representative, House District 20
- ❖ Dr. Doug Reisig: Executive Director, Montana Quality Education Coalition
- ❖ Melissa Romano: Montana Representative, House District 80
- ❖ Doug Rossberg: Title 1 Instructional Coach, Missoula County Public Schools
- ❖ Nicole Simonsen: Superintendent, Culbertson Public Schools
- ❖ Dr. Allison Wilson: Associate Professor and Director of the Institute for Early Childhood Education, University of Montana

McCall Flynn, Executive Director of the Board of Public Education and Caitlin Jensen, Executive Director of Zero to Five Montana, facilitated the Advisory Council meetings and discussions. Sarah Froehlke of Zero to Five Montana provided research and general meeting support.

The Advisory Council followed the scope of work, as determined by the Board of Public Education:

- ❖ Recommend an evaluation methodology which will be used to determine whether a child is at, above, or below a developmental trajectory leading to math proficiency at the completion of 3rd grade.
- ❖ Create a Screening Tools Crosswalk
- ❖ Update ARM [10.54.901](#) Evaluation Methodology for Early Literacy Targeted Interventions
- ❖ Update ARM [10.54.902](#) Jumpstart Program Framework for Early Literacy Targeted Intervention
- ❖ Update ARM 10.54.903 Evaluation Methodology for Early Numeracy Targeted Interventions (temporary ARM [10.54.903](#))
- ❖ Update Title [10.63.1](#) Early Childhood Education Standards

Background

The Legislature found that the ability to read and perform math at or above grade level is essential for educational success. The Legislature also found that too many Montana children are not proficient in math and reading at the end of 3rd grade. The purpose of HB 338 bill is to:

- ❖ provide parents with voluntary early interventions for their children;
- ❖ increase the number of children who are proficient in reading and math at the end of 3rd grade and in doing so, help children develop their full educational potential pursuant to Article X, section 1(1), of the Montana constitution; and
- ❖ foster a strong economic return for the state on early educational investment through enhancing Montana's skilled workforce and decreasing future reliance on social programs and the criminal justice system.

The Advisory Council built on its 2023 work by continuing to develop recommendations for early targeted intervention programming to present to the Board of Public Education, ensuring alignment with existing statute 20-7-Part 18, MCA. In doing so, the Advisory Council prioritized maintaining local control, providing clear and practical guidance to school districts, and aligning new recommendations with already-established rubrics.

While early literacy interventions were guided by the established Science of Reading framework, the Advisory Council determined that no comparable, evidence-based model existed for early numeracy. To address this gap, members examined national best practices and reviewed approaches from other states, including Rhode Island and Kentucky, to inform Montana's emerging framework for early numeracy.

In order to meet the July 1, 2025 implementation date set by HB 338, the Advisory Council recommended to the Board of Public Education a temporary rule authorizing early numeracy instruction for the 2025–2026 school year. The Board of Public Education unanimously approved the recommendation. At the same time, the Advisory Council began drafting a permanent rule that would replace the temporary measure and establish a detailed evaluation methodology for early numeracy.

“Evaluation methodology” means a research-based methodology, instrument, or assessment selected by the Board of Public Education to determine, based on a child's age or grade level, whether the child is above, at, or below a developmental trajectory leading to reading or math proficiency on completion of 3rd grade.

20-7-1803, MCA, states that the Board of Public Education shall select evaluation methodologies to determine, based on a child's age or grade level, whether the child is above, at, or below a developmental trajectory leading to reading or math proficiency on completion of 3rd grade. The evaluation methodologies must be:

- ❖ developmentally appropriate;
- ❖ research-based;
- ❖ cost-effective; and
- ❖ if possible, aligned with formative assessments that inform instruction in the classroom-based program and the jumpstart program.

A child may not be evaluated for the early intervention programs unless requested by the child's parent or guardian. The trustees may administer the evaluation methodology to a child who will be 4 years of age or older on or before the following September 10 and who has not yet entered 3rd grade. A child who is evaluated to be below trajectory for 3rd grade reading or math proficiency for the child's age or grade level is an eligible child.

The Advisory Council emphasized that the evaluation methodology for early numeracy must reflect the natural progression of children's mathematical development, beginning with foundational skills such as number naming, oral counting, and quantity comparison, and building toward strategic counting, problem solving, and addition and subtraction. The Advisory Council identified a defined set of numeracy skills to serve as the basis for assessing children and students and determining eligibility for early targeted intervention programs (Appendix A).

To ensure these skills are introduced and measured at developmentally appropriate stages, the Advisory Council created a Skills Progression Table that aligns each skill with the optimal timing for assessment and instruction (Appendix C).

Conclusion

The work of the Early Literacy and Numeracy Advisory Council reflects Montana’s continued commitment to ensuring every child enters school with the tools they need to succeed. By building upon proven literacy interventions and developing a framework for early numeracy, the Advisory Council has taken important steps to close learning gaps and strengthen educational outcomes across the state. With the temporary rule in place for the 2025–2026 school year and the development of a permanent evaluation methodology underway, Montana is positioned to provide schools with the clarity, resources, and support needed to meet the requirements of HB 338. This collaborative effort among educators, policymakers, and stakeholders underscores the shared vision that all children, regardless of background, should have the opportunity to reach literacy and numeracy proficiency by the end of 3rd grade.

The Montana Early Literacy and Numeracy Advisory Council would like to thank the Board of Public Education for the opportunity to participate in this work. The information and recommendations provided in this document are well researched and have proven to be highly successful in other states. By approving these recommendations, we are confident that more students in Montana will receive early targeted interventions, which will in turn support their pathway to 3rd grade proficiency.

Appendices

- A. Draft Rule – ARM 10.54.903 Early Numeracy Evaluation Methodology
- B. Screening Tools Crosswalk
- C. Skills Progression Table

APPENDIX A

Title 10, Chapter 54, Part 9

Early ~~Literacy~~-Targeted Interventions Standards

10.54.901 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY FOR EARLY LITERACY TARGETED INTERVENTIONS

- (1) The local board of trustees shall adopt and ensure use of an evaluation methodology to identify, enroll, and admit children to early ~~literacy~~-targeted interventions. The evaluation methodology used must be overseen by and include application of professional judgment of qualified employees. A child may not be evaluated for the purposes of these interventions unless requested by the child's parent or guardian. The district must maintain evidence of the request. The evaluation methodology ~~may be administered in April, May, or June, and~~ must assess at least one of the following literacy skills:
- (a) For four-year-olds:
 - (i) oral language;
 - (ii) phonological awareness;
 - (iii) alphabet knowledge.
 - (b) Prior to kindergarten:
 - (i) oral language;
 - (ii) phonological awareness;
 - (iii) alphabet knowledge.
 - (c) Prior to first grade:
 - (i) phoneme awareness;
 - (ii) listening comprehension;
 - (iii) developmental spelling;
 - (iv) vocabulary (expressive or receptive);
 - (v) word reading (nonsense or real);
 - (vi) reading composite.
 - (d) Prior to second grade:
 - (i) listening comprehension;
 - (ii) developmental spelling;
 - (iii) vocabulary (expressive or receptive);
 - (iv) word reading (nonsense or real);
 - (v) connected text reading fluency;
 - (vi) connected text accuracy;
 - (vii) reading composite.
 - (e) Prior to third grade:
 - (i) developmental spelling;
 - (ii) vocabulary (expressive or receptive);
 - (iii) word reading (nonsense or real);
 - (iv) connected text reading fluency;
 - (v) connected text accuracy;
 - (vi) reading comprehension;
 - (vii) reading composite.

- (2) The list of approved evaluation methodology screening tools must be reviewed in odd years through a process of review complying with the provisions of Title 2, chapter 3, MCA, to ensure continuous adherence to developmentally appropriate and research-based screening tool requirements. Any changes to the list must be published and made publicly available by the Board of Public Education no later than 30 days after adoption of any changes. The removal of an evaluation methodology screening tool shall not be effective until July 1 following such removal.
- (3) A local board of trustees adopting and using one of the approved evaluation methodology screening tools shall be construed to have complied with this rule.
 - (a) Use of one of the approved evaluation methodology screening tools shall not, however, be required, provided that the district's adopted evaluation methodology screening tool conforms to the requirements of (1).
- (4) For the purposes of this rule, "evaluation methodology" means an age-appropriate research-based methodology, instrument, or assessment selected by the Board of Public Education to determine, based on a child's age or grade level, whether the child is above, at, or below a developmental trajectory leading to reading or math proficiency on completion of third grade.

AUTH: Mont. Const. Art. X, sec. 9, 20-2-114, 20-7-1803, MCA

IMP: Mont. Const. Art. X, sec. 9, 20-7-1803, MCA

10.54.902 JUMPSTART PROGRAM FRAMEWORK FOR EARLY ~~LITERACY~~-TARGETED INTERVENTIONS

- (1) The local board of trustees may offer a jumpstart program to support early ~~literacy~~-targeted intervention based on evaluation methodology identified in ARM 10.54.901 as aligned to the Montana Early Childhood Education Standards and the Montana Content Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy and Mathematics.
- (2) The jumpstart program must be overseen by and include application of professional judgment of qualified employees and must be designed in a manner to increase the likelihood of a child being evaluated at the end of the ensuing school year to be at or above a trajectory leading to reading or math proficiency at the end of third grade.
- (3) For the purposes of this rule, "jumpstart program" means a program that is at least four weeks in duration and provides at least 120 instructional hours and takes place during the time between the end of one school calendar year and the start of the next school calendar year, as determined by the trustees, preceding a child's entry into kindergarten, first grade, second grade, or third grade.

AUTH: Mont. Const. Art. X, sec. 9, 20-2-114, 20-7-1803, MCA

IMP: Mont. Const. Art. X, sec. 9, 20-7-1803, MCA

10.54.903 ~~EARLY NUMERACY INTEGRATION FOR 2025-26 SCHOOL YEAR~~
EVALUATION METHODOLOGY FOR EARLY NUMERACY TARGETED INTERVENTIONS

- ~~(1) A local school district that administered the evaluation methodology for early literacy targeted interventions in accordance with ARM 10.54.901 in preparation for the 2025-2026 school year may admit qualified students in the classroom-based program for 4-year-olds.~~
- ~~(2) The early targeted interventions may include both English Language Arts and Literacy and Mathematics and Numeracy Content Standards as described in ARM 10.63.110(2).~~
- (1) The local board of trustees shall adopt and ensure use of an evaluation methodology to identify, enroll, and admit children to early targeted interventions. The evaluation methodology used must be overseen by and include application of professional judgment of qualified employees. A child may not be evaluated for the purposes of these interventions unless requested by the child's parent or guardian. The district must maintain evidence of the request. The evaluation methodology must assess at least one of the following numeracy skills:
- (a) For four-year-olds:
 - a. number naming;
 - b. one-to-one correspondence;
 - c. oral counting;
 - d. quantity comparison.
 - (b) Prior to kindergarten:
 - a. number naming;
 - b. one-to-one correspondence;
 - c. oral counting;
 - d. quantity comparison;
 - e. cardinality.
 - (c) Prior to first grade:
 - a. oral counting;
 - b. quantity comparison;
 - c. cardinality;
 - d. subitizing;
 - e. numeral identification;
 - f. math composite.
 - (d) Prior to second grade:
 - a. subitizing;
 - b. number order;
 - c. strategic counting;
 - d. numeral identification;
 - e. number comparison;
 - f. addition and subtraction;
 - g. math composite.
 - (e) Prior to third grade:
 - a. numeral identification;
 - b. number comparison;

- c. addition and subtraction;
- d. problems in context;
- e. math composite.

- (2) The list of approved evaluation methodology screening tools must be reviewed in odd years through a process of review complying with the provisions of Title 2, chapter 3, MCA, to ensure continuous adherence to developmentally appropriate and research-based screening tool requirements. Any changes to the list must be published and made publicly available by the Board of Public Education no later than 30 days after adoption of any changes. The removal of an evaluation methodology screening tool shall not be effective until July 1 following such removal.
- (3) A local board of trustees adopting and using one of the approved evaluation methodology screening tools shall be construed to have complied with this rule.
 - (a) Use of one of the approved evaluation methodology screening tools shall not, however, be required, provided that the district's adopted evaluation methodology screening tool conforms to the requirements of (1).
- (4) For the purposes of this rule, "evaluation methodology" means an age-appropriate research-based methodology, instrument, or assessment selected by the Board of Public Education to determine, based on a child's age or grade level, whether the child is above, at, or below a developmental trajectory leading to reading or math proficiency on completion of third grade.

AUTH: Mont. Const. Art. X, sec. 9, 20-2-114, 20-7-1803, MCA
IMP: Mont. Const. Art. X, sec. 9, 20-7-1803, MCA

APPENDIX C

Early Numeracy Skills Progression Table					
Numeracy Skills	Assessments Prior to Grade Level				
	4-Year-Old	K	1st	2nd	3rd
Number Naming	X	X			
One-to-One Correspondence	X	X			
Oral Counting	X	X	X		
Quantity Comparison	X	X	X		
Cardinality		X	X		
Subitizing			X	X	
Number Order				X	
Strategic Counting				X	
Numeral Identification			X	X	X
Number Comparison				X	X
Addition and Subtraction				X	X
Problems in Context					X
Math Composite			X	X	X