



Explorers Academy

Encourage, Empower, and Educate All Children

North Park • Terry Park • Laurel • Lockwood

Annual Report

2019-2020 EDITION

A New Directors Perspective

per·spec·tive

Noun. A particular attitude toward or way of regarding something; a point of view.

The last year has brought a whirlwind of change for our agency and our world. While change can be unexpected and appear out of our control, the way we seize the opportunity to adapt is what really matters.

I was honored by the opportunity to become the Interim Executive Director for Explorers Academy in March 2020. While my predecessor only served our agency for a few months, my perspective is that the lasting impact he left on staff morale reignited our excitement to serve children and families through high-quality, comprehensive services.

COVID-19 hit our community suddenly and unexpectedly. With a Sunday evening directive from our Governor, Explorers Academy, along with schools and daycares across Montana, was closed. As we adjusted to our home working environments and learned to serve children and families remotely, we also pondered the loss of in-person learning. We questioned: will we get to see the kids again? Will we have the opportunity to say good-bye? During this time, I contemplated my sense of purpose, I worried about my coworkers and friends, and I wondered about the children and families we serve.

With a few adjustments in perspective, I now cherish the moments I had working from home alongside my spouse and children. We established new traditions and truly relished in spending quality time with each other.

The sudden end to in-person learning, motivated us as a program to innovate services and to celebrate in new, exciting ways. Four-year-olds can have Zoom meetings! Virtual lessons and story time via YouTube can be exciting. Who knew a drive-thru preschool graduation could bring so many happy tears?

As the 2019/2020 program year at Explorers Academy came to a close, our program was granted the opportunity to provide a small, 6-week, in-person summer session for children transitioning to Kindergarten. This unique opportunity was made possible through CARES Act funding. It gave our program the unprecedented chance to provide high-quality education and nutrition services to children in loving, fun, and well-staffed classrooms. It gave our program the exact perspective necessary to fulfill our mission, vision, and values, while transitioning to the start of a new preschool year in a healthy and safe way.

I am grateful for a new perspective and excited for all the good things to come!

-Janice King

Janice King
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Janice King has been an Explorers Academy employee for over 15 years. Her extensive knowledge in Early Childhood Education, Family Services, and Head Start have been an asset to our program.



In The Classroom

At Explorers Academy, it is our mission to ensure children are prepared for kindergarten and ready for lifelong success. Our teachers are dedicated, well trained educators, who value the uniqueness of the children in their care. Each classroom follows the Montana State Early Learning Objectives and Head Start Early Learning Outcomes to ensure our children receive high-quality early childhood education. Our program is equipped with evidence based curriculum including Creative Curriculum, Second Step, Heggerty Phonological Curriculum, and Handwriting without Tears. **These curriculums help us prepare students socially, emotionally, and cognitively for their entrance into kindergarten.**



Creative Curriculum, our main academic curriculum, encourages child-centered and play-driven learning. Our teachers transform the classroom environment in ways that allow children to learn as they play. This provides opportunities for children to direct their own education and instills a deep, life-long love of learning. **Our classrooms focus on hands-on, interactive activities that serve many different types of learners.** These activities meet children at their individual developmental stage and ignite their curiosity while addressing learning objectives. Our Education Staff know that when students are curious about what they are learning, they are more likely to be engaged and active participants in their education. Encouraging the natural imagination of our Explorers Academy students ensures their educational success as they get ready for kindergarten. By using this interactive style of learning, we are ensuring students become active, engaged, and successful citizens as they grow.



All children at Explorers Academy participate in developmental and social emotional screenings to identify individual strengths and areas for growth. In partnership with parents, our education staff use screening and observational information to develop individualized goals and learning activities for every child. **At Explorers Academy, we know parents are a child's first and most important teacher.** We create relationships with parents and guardians to ensure that students are in an environment where they can thrive both in the classroom and at home. We know school readiness includes acquiring skills that allow children to engage in nurturing relationships, demonstrate self-control, follow instructions, and solve problems.

From Closure to Celebration

In March 2020, along with all schools and daycares in Montana, Explorers Academy closed its doors to in-person learning. While we were not able to continue our mission as we previously had, we did not allow COVID-19 to stop our children from learning or hinder our relationships with our children and families. We continued to connect with our children and families and were able to provide educational services remotely. The creativity and dedication of our staff was phenomenal. Teachers were able to connect with students via video chat, phone, and electronic apps. Children received detailed learning packets at home to continue their progress towards their educational goals. While we were not able to celebrate the accomplishments of our children and families in person, we did not allow their hard work to be overlooked. We held a "Drive-Thru Graduation" allowing children, families, and staff to celebrate with each other from a safe distance.



COVID-19

Summer Program

Through CARES Act funding, Explorers Academy was able to offer an in-person summer program to ensure children were ready to transition to kindergarten despite COVID-19. For 6 weeks, we provided high quality education, nutrition, and family support to 78 children in a safe and loving environment. Our classrooms followed safety guidelines while engaging children in fun, exploratory, and developmentally appropriate activities. Children were able to learn and grow with unique opportunities including water play, gardening, a visit from the ice cream truck, and a trip to the local zoo. Twenty-four members of our extraordinary staff dedicated their time to ensuring children and families were ready for kindergarten in the face of an unprecedented global pandemic. Our 2020 Summer Program will always be remembered as a ray of sunshine during an unpredictable year.



Family Engagement

At Explorers Academy, we know parents are their child's first and most important teacher. Parents play an important role in shaping their child's education and lifelong success.

We partner with parents through:

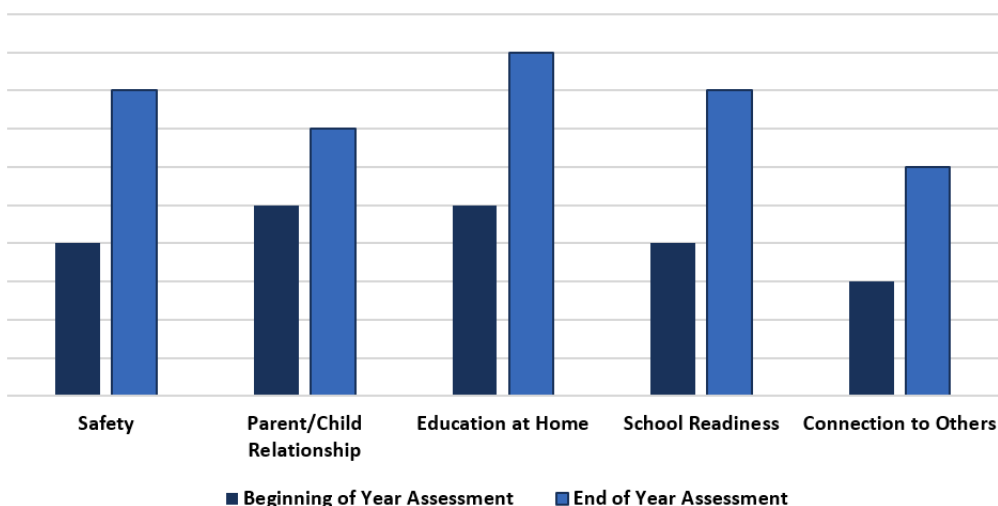
- Home Visiting
- Parent\Teacher Conferences
- Family Goal Setting
- Parent Committee
- Policy Council
- Parenting Class
- Crisis Assistance
- Community Referrals
- Parent Volunteering
- Family Celebrations
- Educational Workshops
- CPR & First Aid Class

Our families received **1,366** community referrals.

Our Family Advocates meet individually with parents to help identify strengths, develop goals, and provide support for becoming self-sufficient. Our Family Outcomes Assessment uses key indicators to build on family strengths and track progress throughout the program year. Key indicators include:

• Housing • Safety • Health/Mental Health • Transportation • Financial Security • Employment • Nutrition • Parent/Child Relationship • Education at Home • School Readiness • Community Connections • Leadership and Advocacy •

Family Outcomes





Bobbie's Story

“I’ll never forget the first time he got on the bus with his little back pack on. He was so happy,” Bobbie Leyva remembers her son’s first day at Explorers Academy. “I heard preschool was an important stepping stone for kids,” she says explaining why she decided to apply for the program.

All three of Bobbie’s children have attended Explorers Academy starting with her son, Jason, in 2016. Her daughter, Danielle, will complete her last year of the program in 2021. “When we first started at Explorers Academy, being independent was my biggest challenge,” Bobbie recalls. “Our life was chaotic then.” Bobbie did not have a driver’s license and was often unable to leave her house. With support from Danielle’s teacher and their Family Advocate, Bobbie started working on getting her driver’s license and improving her mobility. **“The staff are so supportive and friendly, they were always there for me when I needed them,”** Bobbie shares. “When things in my life were hard my Family Advocate and teacher were there for me. They are an awesome support system.” Bobbie says staff not only supported her personal and family goals but also helped with day to day things like transportation and food.



In 2019, Bobbie started volunteering in her daughter’s classroom. “Volunteering in the classroom has helped me feel more independent and has impacted my social life in a positive way. It makes me feel needed and important to be with the children. It makes me feel better about myself.” She loves volunteering at Explorers Academy so much that she has started volunteering at her older children’s schools as well. Bobbie has become an advocate for her children’s education including working with them on educational activities at home.

Bobbie can see the growth in both herself and her family in their years with Explorers Academy. “That’s when I get really proud of my kids, when I look back and see how far they have come,” Bobbie says. **“You can tell my kids have been to Explorers Academy- it gave them a huge step up.”** Bobbie shares her children have not only learned to write their names and count to 100, but they also learned how to play with others and express their emotions. Bobbie’s youngest, Danielle, will be graduating from Explorers Academy soon. “She is kindergarten ready!” Bobbie says.



With support from teachers and Family Advocates, Bobbie obtained her driver’s license, giving her more freedom and flexibility. She gained financial stability by taking small steps such as paying off fines. She is more involved in her children’s learning and is an advocate for her family. One of the biggest changes Bobbie sees in herself is the way she is able to see her future in a positive way. **“I love coming to Explorers Academy and seeing the kids smile every day because they are in a safe and fun environment!”**

417
children and
families served

Health Services

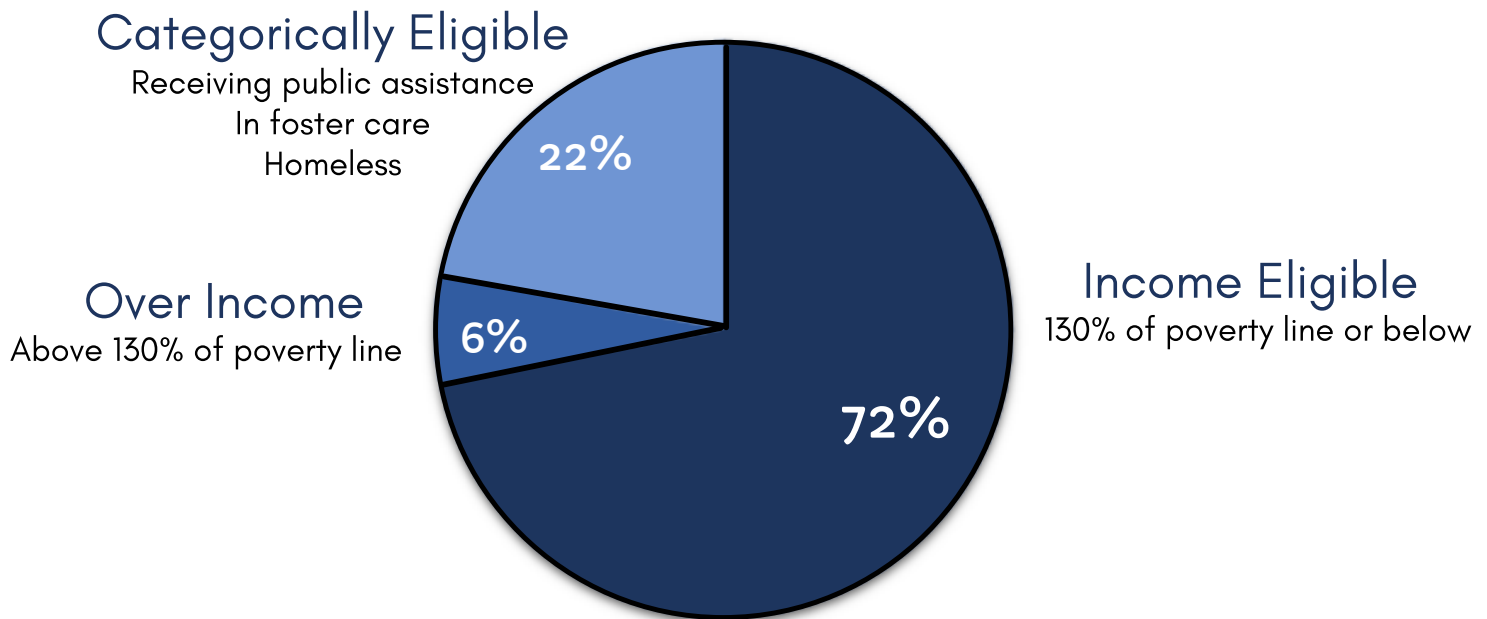
58% of enrolled children
received medical exams

71% received dental exams

89% participated
in Health Screenings



Income Eligibility



Nutrition Services

· Breakfast · Lunch · Snack ·

Our children
receive



of their daily
nutrition at school

78,032 meals served

Average monthly enrollment

100%

Average Daily Attendance

86%

Statement of Financial Position

As of June 30	2020	2019
Assets		
Current Assets:		
Cash	\$ 422,190	\$ 207,240
Restricted Cash	47,208	50,572
Investments	-	158,548
Accounts Receivable, net	-	7,706
Travel Advances	1,540	-
Insurance Receivable	263,025	-
Grant Receivables	216,653	358,436
Prepaid Expenses	-	26,370
Total Current Assets	950,616	808,872
Property and Equipment, net of accumulated depreciation	1,871,544	2,157,036
Total Assets	\$ 2,822,160	\$ 2,965,908
Liabilities and Net Assets		
Current Liabilities		
Accounts Payable	\$ 149,255	\$ 159,127
Accrued Payroll and Benefits	143,015	88,063
Security Deposits	-	148,939
Advances From Grantors	-	19,216
Accrued Interest	2,400	-
Current Portion of Notes Payable	25,402	24,222
Total Current Liabilities	320,072	439,567
Long-term Liabilities		
Notes Payable, net of current portion	522,803	548,555
Total Liabilities	842,875	988,122
Net Assets		
Without Donor Restrictions		
Undesignated	1,932,077	1,927,214
With Donor Restrictions		
Purpose Restrictions	47,208	50,572
Total Net Assets	1,979,285	1,977,786
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$ 2,822,160	\$ 2,965,908

Statement of Activities

Year Ended June 30, 2020	Without Donor Restrictions	With Donor Restrictions	Total
Revenues and Support			
Grants	\$ 3,846,026	\$ -	\$ 3,846,026
Student Tuition and Fees	22,056	-	22,056
Donated Goods and Services		-	325,836
Contributions		22,091	48,714
Net Investment Income		-	4,159
Insurance Proceeds		-	366,663
Other Revenue		-	46,906
Net Assets Released from Restrictions:	-	-	-
Satisfaction of donor-imposed restrictions	25,455	(25,455)	-
Total Revenues and Support	4,663,724	(3,364)	4,660,360
Expenses			
Program Services	3,851,993	-	3,851,993
Management and General	806,633	-	806,633
Fundraising		-	235
Total Expenses			
Change in Net Assets	4,863	(3,364)	1,499
Net Assets, beginning of year	1,927,214	50,572	1,979,258
Net Assets, end of year	\$ 1,932,077	\$ 47,208	\$ 1,979,285

Fiscal Audit

The Fiscal Audit performed for the year ending June 30, 2020 showed no findings and had no questioned costs. Explorers Academy has strong internal controls in place to assess risk and safeguard federal money.

Explorers Academy is incredibly fortunate to be a part of a supportive community who dedicates their time, money, and resources to supporting our mission and changing the lives of our children and families. Our most sincere gratitude goes to:

First Interstate Bank
Valley Credit Union
Montana State University, Billings
MSUB City College
Montana State University Nursing Program
Rocky Mountain College
University of Mary
Rimrock Pediatric Dental
Youth Leadership Billings
Kiwanis Club
Billings Public Schools
Laurel Public Schools
Lockwood School District
Yellowstone West Carbon County Co-op
Foster Grandparents Program
Bright Smiles
Stockman Bank



Adult Resource Alliance
Family Support Network
Knights of Columbus
United Way
Benedict's Affordable Cartridges
Ace Hardware
Sherwin Williams
Entre Technology Services
Allegra Marketing
Triple J Cleaning
Rocky Mountain Compost
Billings Clinic Foundation
Phillips 66
Accent Print Shop
SCL Health St. Vincent's Hospital
ZooMT
Yellowstone East Co-op

A special thank you to the employees of First Interstate Bank who dedicated their personal time and funds to create healthy meal boxes for our neediest families during winter break.

Community Partners

Board of Directors

Explorers Academy would not be the high quality, comprehensive program we are without the unwavering support we receive from our Board of Directors. Our Board of Directors is a dynamic team of community members who volunteer their time and expertise to govern our program, develop our community, and make positive change in the lives of children and families.

2019-2020
Erin Allen, Board Chair • Billings Clinic Pediatrics
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Eric George • Stockman Bank
Heidi Jensen-Christison • Interstate Engineering
Chase Brown • Netzer Law Office
Sue DeVries • Retiree
Jessica Gaard • Century 21

Thank you to everyone on our Board of Directors for your hard work and dedication to our program!