



Frequently Asked Questions - Home-Based Learning Program

Overview

The Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) offers the Home-Based Learning Program through Waterford Upstart, providing young learners with structured, at-home early literacy instruction. For the 2025–26 school year, OPI has 1,500 licenses to allocate to school districts for eligible students.

This program is designed to help children build foundational reading and literacy skills before entering or while in early grades, supporting long-term academic success. Students must be identified as eligible by their local school district to participate.

New! Watch a [video](#) recording of a meeting with Waterford representatives. During this meeting, districts were given information to help them support eligible students and their families.

For Schools and Districts

Is district participation required?

- No. Participation in the home-based program is optional for districts and schools.

Which students are eligible for the program?

- Eligible students are:
 - 4 years old or older on or before September 10 of the school year, and;
 - Have not yet completed 2nd grade.

How is eligibility determined?

- Districts determine eligibility using an approved evaluation methodology or tool. Each district sets its own eligibility criteria for participation.
- Schools need to create an eligibility report in Infinite Campus to indicate eligibility to OPI.

Can my district still obtain licenses for eligible students?

- Yes. Licenses are still available. Please contact Kimberly Evans at kimberly.evans@mt.gov to request licenses for your eligible students.

How do we notify families about eligibility?

- Waterford provides a customizable family letter for schools to send to eligible students' families.
 - Each letter includes a student-specific access code generated when the student is rostered.
 - Schools are encouraged to discuss eligibility with the family in person or to send the letter home in a sealed envelope along with program information and a flyer.



For Parents and Families

How do I know if my child's school is offering this program?

- Because participation is optional, please contact your local school district to find out if they are offering the Waterford Home-Based Learning Program.

How do I know if my child qualifies?

- Children who are 4 years old by September 10 through second grade must be screened by their school to determine eligibility.
- Eligibility is based on the district's established criteria.

My child qualified. What happens next?

- After qualification, you will receive a letter from your school containing:
 - Your child's unique access code
 - Instructions to log in and set up an account
 - Questions about whether your child requires a computer or internet access

How much time should my child spend on the program?

- Children show the most growth when they use the program at least 15 minutes per day, five days per week. Consistent use strengthens early literacy skills and prepares children for long-term academic success.
- Consistent use helps build a strong foundation in early literacy and prepares students for long-term academic success.

Where can I learn more about Waterford Upstart?

- Watch this [introductory video](#) to learn more about the Waterford program and how it supports early learners.